

HINDUISM

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Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



AT LORD BALAJI'S FEET IN TIRUPATI



THOMAS KELLY



THOMAS KELLY

COVER: Pilgrims touch the sculpted stone feet in Tirumala Temple's Srivari Padalu shrine which mark the place where Lord Vishnu first stepped upon the Earth. (Above) Pilgrim spins the prayer wheels at the Hindu-Buddhist temple of Muktinath in Nepal.

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PARTHIVA, THE YEAR OF EARTHLY PROSPERITY

Bodhinatha Veylanawami

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Faces of Worship

The countenance of these ardent devotees reveal the life-changing experience twenty million souls have each year on the journey to South India's most famous Vaishnava temple for the blessings of the Lord of Seven Hills. Hinduism Today also made this pilgrimage.... Page 18



Visual testimony: (Clockwise from upper left) Lord Balaji's temple in Tirumala is radiant with gold at daybreak. A zealous student at the priest-training center chants scripture with a full heart. A family on pilgrimage takes a break in the shade. A shaven headed devotee worships the holy

feet of Lord Balaji in a small shrine called Srivari Padalu on a mountain overlooking Tirumala. Devotees foster patience as they wait in the non-VIP line for Lord Balaji's darshan (benevolent look of blessing). (Background) The lush mountainous terrain surrounding Balaji's abode.



Basking in Divine radiance: (above) A simple smile reveals the joy of having just experienced the darshan of Lord Balaji. (Right) A mother and child, heads newly shaven, enjoy a free meal near the Balaji temple. (Below) A photo taken from a satellite shows the mountainous setting of Tirumala just 15 miles from world-famous Tirupati and 125 miles from Chennai on India's southeastern coast.



ALL PHOTOS THOMAS KELLY

COURTESY: GOOGLE EARTH



Giant windows offer an uplifting view of the main tower from inside the winter-protected temple with heated floor

A U S T R A L I A

New Temple in Perth

AFTER 20 YEARS OF PLANNING, HARD WORK AND FUND-raising, the 6,000 Hindus of Western Australia now have a temple in the beautiful, remote city of Perth. The grand consecration of the Perth Hindu Temple was held on September 8, 2005. The huge, 13,000-square-foot structure, based on the Smarta theology, contains shrines for Ganapati, Siva, Shakti, Vishnu, Subramanya, Navagraha and others. The vision to encompass the needs of all Hindus of all denominations required a large facility—a financial challenge for the small community. Blessed and encouraged by many visiting saints through the years, the group persevered through ups and downs for two decades to achieve their goal. It is another triumph for Hindus in far off places. See www.hindu.org.au



Visuals worth thousands of words

C A N A D A

Museum with A Message

LEADERS OF THE VISHNU Mandir, Richmond, Ontario, Canada, have manifested a brilliant initiative to bring awareness of Hinduism to the local

community and younger generation through the hi-tech Canadian Museum of Hindu Civilization. Built at the temple complex at a cost of 5 million dollars and completed in 2004, the 17,000-square-foot museum is already getting rave reviews from local community high school groups and Canadian visitors. Dedicated to world peace, the museum focuses on Hinduism's teachings of nonviolence and tolerance. With video screens installed next to displays and a multimedia presentation center underway, it is a cutting-edge, modern approach to promoting positive awareness of Hinduism in the West and educating a new generation of Hindus born outside India. For information and directions see: www.cmohc.ca

DIASPORA

U S A

1,000 Youth Worship Ganesha

THE 2005 GANESHA PUJA conducted by the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) for children in Northern California on September 9 brought a record number of participants. Over 1,000 children and youth

did puja with the support of 2,000 families at three venues: Sunnyvale, Fremont and San Ramon. Youngsters now look forward to the annual event with eager anticipation.

It is a testimony to the success of the American extension of India's RSS. Disciplined, organized and on the move, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, USA, now has 90 chapters with 15,000 families participating in weekly, monthly and annual events across the country.



Group Ganesha puja, an innovative model for involving youth

S I N G A P O R E

Religion's Big In Singapore

THE STRAITS TIMES OF Singapore carried out a 2004 religion survey of 622 residents in the city. Its July report on the results revealed that, despite the hi-tech secular culture of the city, religion remains strong, with 86 percent saying they follow some religion. Over half of these devote time daily to prayer, meditation and reading of religious books. Of the total population, 42.5% are Buddhists, 14.9% Muslims, 14.6% Christians, 8.5% Taoists, 4% Hindus, 0.6% other and 14.8% with no religion. The percentage of Christians has gone up, with the majority of converts to new independent protestant

churches coming from the Chinese community—a phenomenon which concerns mainstream religious organizations, sparking new approaches for outreach to their own youth.



Sangeeta Thanapal, 22, one of Singapore's 100,000 Hindus, found faith in Hinduism's logic and philosophy at age 18

F R A N C E / U K

Rama Shoes Removed From Market

I N MAY, 2004, THE FRENCH fashion group Minelli manufactured and sold shoes in France decorated with the image of Lord Rama. When this was discovered, Hindu Human Rights and the Hindu Forum of Britain mounted a



Minelli's Rama shoes, no longer sold

protest. At first the French company was silent in response to the onslaught of phone calls and letters, which only further enraged Hindus. A month of pressure followed, including a protest march in front of the French embassy in London. Minelli finally relented, removing the shoes from shelves and proffering a letter of apology. The letter was sent to the Hindu Forum in Britain, along with 500 pairs of the shoes.

Hindu Human Rights leaders were now faced with the responsibility of destroying the shoes. As they carried the sacred image of Lord Rama, they could not simply throw them in the dumpster. Suggestions on what to do ranged from burning, chemical removal of the image, to putting pairs of the shoes in temples for worship as sacred *paduka*. It was finally decided to peel off the image while chanting "Jai Shri Rama," immerse those images in the Ganges and burn the shoes amid chanting of slokas to Lord Rama.

A F R I C A

Pan-African Hindu Council Grows Strong

I N SEPTEMBER, 2005, THE Hindu Council of Africa (HCA) held a conference in Mauritius attended by 40 representatives from 15 African nations. Started in 1998 as an outgrowth of the Hindu Council of Kenya, the HCA now includes 19 nations. Collaboration over such a transnational region is challenging. But through the dedicated efforts of Muljibhai Pindolia, President and Kenya representative, the HCA is gaining recognition. Activities to date have mostly consisted of Hindu Council representatives bringing the Hindu voice to

pan-African and international bodies. These include the African Council of Religious Leaders, International Conference on AIDS, Inter-faith Action for Peace in Africa, and others. The organization has solidified and is now doing more work on the ground, such as distribution of hospital equipment donated by a US trust and setting up a Hindu resource network for Hindus moving around Africa. HCA was recently honored to be accredited as a partner organization with the UN Habitat, which is working to alleviate slum conditions in mega-cities.

Seeing education as critical to the future, HCA's latest initiative is a ten-year plan to take the successful Kenya Hindu Religion Education curriculum and textbooks into the national educational system of every African nation with a Hindu population.



Indian craftsmen paint the Deity images for the new temple

U S A

Small Community Completes Temple on 35 Acres in Iowa

LONG TIME CONTRIBUTOR TO HINDUISM TODAY, THE LATE Dr. Prem Sahai, years ago purchased 35 acres of land in Iowa, near the Des Moines River about 30 miles north of Des Moines. He donated the land to the Hindu Temple and Cultural Center of Iowa. Seven years later a band of 750 families completed a \$1.5 million temple there and held the consecration rites in June of 2005, conducted by 11 priests from all over the US. The main Deity is Balaji. They have two full-time priests, one from Karnataka and one from Delhi. Plans are in the works for a separate Indian Cultural Center. See www.iowatemple.org



Pundit Munelal and wife Naveeta on stage in South Africa

T R I N I D A D / A F R I C A

Charismatic Pundit From Trinidad

PUNDIT MUNELAL MAHARAJ, singer, preacher and author from Trinidad, along with his talented wife Naveeta, is inspiring Hindu crowds in

other nations—connecting with a contemporary one-to-one personal style. "We take young people from where they are and not from where you want them to be. I use music, jokes, discussions on AIDS, drugs. It's a fusion, a synchronous undertaking." Their 2005 tour of South Africa was a big hit, and he has been invited back in 2006. His USA/Canada camps are packed. See www.punditmunelal.com



A key service of Sewa volunteers was helping interview victims, establish needs and connect them with existing relief programs

U S A

Katrina Relief By Hindus

SEWa INTERNATIONAL, IN concert with the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, helped coordinate hundreds of Hindu volunteers, small temples and Indian-American organizations during post-Katrina relief work in Houston, San Antonio and Atlanta. In less than a week after the hurricane, they raised over \$100,000 for relief. Houston alone had 150,000 evacuees.

Over 240 Sewa volunteers from all over the country fed people in shelters for an entire day, breakfast, lunch and dinner. Other services included assembling hygiene packets for evacuees at the Houston Astrodome and finding alternative accommodations for those staying in hotels and motels. Tech professionals helped set up the Astrodome Community Technology Center, which enabled people to register themselves and find their kin online. You can help Sewa with their relief work. Go to www.sewausa.org to learn what you can do.

BRIEFLY...

DEBUNKING AIP (ARYAN INVASION Propaganda) is going mainstream. BBC's website now carries an excellent article on the faults and dangers of this scientifically untenable theory that promotes racism and distorts Hinduism. We recommend Hindus use this article to protest the continued promotion of this theory in school textbooks. Go to www.bbc.com, click on Religion and Ethics, Hinduism, History.

INDIAN SCIENTISTS BELIEVE THAT as CO2 emissions increase, the ancient glacier in Nepal that feeds the holy river Ganges may melt down before the end of the 21st century. Nepal is home to the Himalayan mountain region whose glaciers contribute to the water supply for millions of people in the area. Many of its glaciers are turning into lakes whose waters

threaten downstream villages. Nepali consumers create 20 times less CO2 than American consumers. Campaigners in Nepal want rich nations to pay for damages they have caused to the climate. If the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) turns the mountain chain into a world heritage site, then in theory all the member governments may be responsible for the damage.

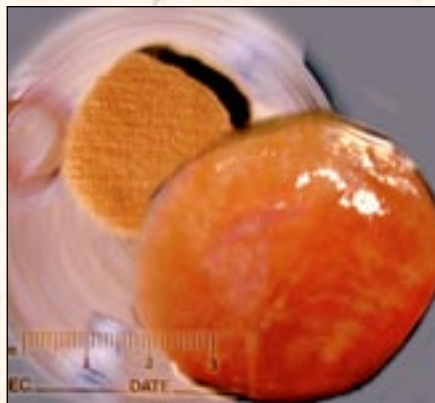
IN SEPTEMBER, 2005, MADURAI Meenakshi temple released all but one of its 60 parrots to the wild. Only a single bird was kept to maintain the tradition of keeping parrots, sacred to Goddess Meenakshi. The birds were set free following requests from animal welfare organizations and state forest department officials. Priest Chonandaram said, "The tra-

S W I T Z E R L A N D

Disembodied Animal Food?

NEW HARVEST, A WASHINGTON, DC-based nonprofit, www.new-harvest.org, is developing lab-grown meats that may replace the present method of raising animals in confined conditions. They claim that one cell from an animal, grown and multiplied in a culture, could supply the world's annual meat supply. Methods for producing cultured meat include growing the cells on small beads, which would result in processed products like hamburger or chicken nuggets; and growing them on thin, flat membranes to approximate the look and texture of beef steak. The group says that food-borne pathogens like salmonella and listeria could be better controlled and that there would be no need to slaughter animals that supply the

cells. The planet would benefit, too, since the greenhouse gases created by modern animal agriculture would be greatly reduced. Many animal advocates, including the US Humane Society, are in favor of cultured meat, which could be available by 2012. Still, one vegan said: "While cultured meat could certainly mitigate the ethical, environmental and health concerns behind the vegan choice, I doubt hard-core ethical vegans are going to eat it. I know I won't." Nor would we!



Harvard University lab-grown lamb

dition of keeping parrots has been continuing for the past 100 years. It was painful to see them fly away. But the birds, known for their tremendous energy, who could copy whatever you told them, will be happier now, than living in cages."

FEMA'S DECISION TO REIMBURSE churches and other religious organizations for relief work after hurricane Katrina has come under scrutiny. It raises concerns about the separation of religion and government, political expedience and accountability. Hindu organizations considering accepting such government grants are advised to read the article by Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, a Christian, president of The Interfaith Alliance, the national non-partisan advocacy voice of the interfaith movement. See www.tompaine.com and search for "Keeping FEMA Out of Church."

IN OCTOBER, 2005, THE UK Armed Forces appointed their

first Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh chaplains, recruited with the help of representatives from the various faiths. Their names are being withheld until they complete training.

THE SECOND CONFERENCE OF the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha was held in Mumbai on October 16-18, 2005. This body of ordained Hindu leaders set forth resolutions on three major issues relating to the sense of self-esteem and health of Hindu society. They are: the control of temples by governments treating them as merely public charitable institutions and not as places of worship and cultural value to Hindus; the rampant religious conversion that is taking place unabated without hindrance from governments; and the unjust reverse discrimination to which Hindus are subjected by organs of the State in the country under a wholly untenable pretext of secularism. A full report will appear in our next issue.



HINDU RENAISSANCE TEAM

HINDUISM TODAY was founded January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred Vedas and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish a resource for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, reports on events and encouraging others. to subscribe.

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IN MY OPINION

Yoga Renamed Is Still Hindu

I challenge attempts to snatch yoga from its roots

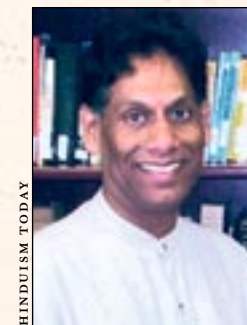
BY SUBHAS R. TIWARI

IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS I have received several calls from journalists around the country seeking my views on the question of whether the newly minted "Christian Yoga" is really yoga.

My response is, "The simple, immutable fact is that yoga originated from the Vedic or Hindu culture. Its techniques were not adopted by Hinduism, but originated from it." These facts need to be unequivocally stated in light of some of the things being written to the contrary by yoga teachers. The effort to separate yoga from Hinduism must be challenged because it runs counter to the fundamental principles upon which yoga itself is premised, the *yamas* (restraints) and *niyamas* (observances). These ethical tenets and religious practices are the first two limbs of the eight-limbed *ashtanga* yoga system which also includes *asana* (postures), *pranayama* (breath control), *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (contemplation/Self Realization). Efforts to separate yoga from its spiritual center reveal ignorance of the goal of yoga.

I believe such efforts point to a concerted, long-term plan to deny yoga its origin. This effort to extricate yoga from its Hindu mold and cast it under another name is far from innocent. It is reminiscent of the pattern evident throughout the long history and dynamics of colonizing powers. Firstly, the physical geography of a people was colonized, then their mental arena. Now we are witnessing the next phase, the encroachment on the spiritual territory of Hinduism which began in the last few decades. Some of the agents behind "Christian Yoga" also draw from the same treasure chest which supports the conversion movements of Hindus and other sacred cultures.

In 1989, Pope Benedict, then Cardinal Ratzinger, issued a scathing report against yoga and warned Catholics of "dangers and errors" from "non-Christian forms of meditation." He stated, "The Hindu concept of



HINDUISM TODAY

absorbing of the human self into the divine self is never possible, not even in the highest states of grace." In 2003, the Vatican issued a more conciliatory directive permitting Catholics to engage in the "New Age" in general and yoga specifically, but still warning against its spiritual and meditation practices. "I want to say simply that the New

Age presents itself as a false utopia in answer to the profound thirst for happiness in the human heart. New Age is a misleading answer to the oldest hopes of man," said Cardinal Paul Poupard. This document gives its blessings for Catholics to practice yoga, but not as a spiritual discipline!

Today, however, we are witnessing an initiative toward yoga from ordinary Christians whose positive physical, mental and spiritual health and well being experienced as a result of "engaging" yoga cannot be denied or ignored. This 5,000-year-old system is perhaps the best known, most accessible and cost effective health and beauty program around. Yoga is also much more, as it was intended by the Vedic seers as an instrument which can lead one to apprehend the Absolute, Ultimate Reality, called the Brahman Reality, or God. If this attempt to co-opt yoga into their own tradition continues, in several decades of incessantly spinning the untruth as truth through re-labelings such as "Christian yoga," who will know that yoga is—or was—part of Hindu culture?

The giant tree of yoga whose limbs reach high up into the different atmospheres, and whose branches stretch across the wide river offering its protection to so many, cannot deny that its roots are located in a specific place—Hinduism. Seeking shelter under its vast umbrella does not entitle you to change the tree; instead, learn from its unselfish display of love and generosity.

Subhas R. Tiwari is a professor at the Hindu University of America. He is a graduate of the famed Bihar Yoga Bharati University with a master's degree in yoga philosophy.

Defining Our Faith

A three-fold answer to the basic questions:
“Who is a Hindu?” and “What is Hinduism?”

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY RECENTLY TO give a number of lectures, classes, seminars and presentations at our monastery in Hawaii, in Hindu temples in Toronto and Edmonton and at the Dharma Summit 2005 conference of North American Hindu temples and institutions in New Brunswick, New Jersey. During question-and-answer sessions and in casually talking to those attending, discussions arose on “Who is a Hindu?” and “What is Hinduism?” The concerns of those asking the questions varied considerably, and therefore the nature of my answers also varied somewhat. I compiled my responses in a three-fold answer that you may find useful when these commonly asked questions come up in your community, business or social circles.



be kept away from him?”

As expressed in this statement and in Gurudeva's insight, the Hindu concept is that each soul is moving ever closer to God over a period of many lives. And when a soul reaches sufficient spiritual maturity, it naturally awakens a conscious desire to know God as its inmost essence, to experience Truth personally. This spiritual longing then leads the soul to take up the practices and study the philosophy of Sanatana Dharma in order to complete the process of knowing itself. Thus it is quite clear, from the Hindu point of view, that you cannot keep Sanatana Dharma out of a country when it already resides within the soul of every person in that country, waiting to be expressed at some point in the future. We can compare the inherent search for Truth that exists within the soul to a dormant seed hidden in the soil waiting for the right conditions to sprout. This first response is the philosophical and mystical definition of Hinduism.

2. Hinduism Is the Religion of the Vedas

The second part of the answer to “Who is a Hindu?” and “What is Hinduism?” is that Hinduism is the Vaidika Dharma, or religion of the Vedas. In other words, Hinduism encompasses all religious traditions that accept the Vedas as scriptural authority. Religious traditions in India that do not accept the Vedas are Indian but not Hindu. Among these are Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism, which rejected the Vedas and thus emerged as completely distinct religions, disassociated from Hinduism, while still sharing many philosophical insights and cultural values with their parent faith.

The Vedas are revealed scripture, or *shruti*, meaning “that which is heard.” They are timeless teachings transmitted to *rishis*, or seers, directly by God thousands of years ago. For countless centuries the Vedas, particularly their *Upanishads*, have been the basis of philosophical inquiry, debate and commentary. This attention has given rise to countless schools of thought. Revealed scripture is also the subject of deep study, meditation and yogic practice, to realize the wisdom of the ancients within oneself. Most of Hinduism's sacred mantras are drawn from *shruti*, used for rites of worship, both public and domestic, as well as personal prayer and japa. Though sometimes the *Bhagavad Gita* is put forward as Hinduism's core scripture, its “Bible,” this, of course, is not the case. The *Bhagavad Gita* is a historical epic, or *Itihasa*, accepted as a central scripture by Vaishnava and Smarta followers, but not so regarded in the Shakta or Saiva traditions. The Vedas are the revealed scriptures that all Hindus hold in common.

It is also vital to mention that scripture in Hinduism does not have the same place as it does in many other faiths. Hinduism is

premised on realization. To be enlightened, one must have personal experience of the truths set out in the Vedas. It is not sufficient, in Hinduism, to simply own, read and believe in a holy text, even the Vedas.

Another point regarding Vaidika Dharma is that sometimes the words *Hindu* and *Indian* are used in ways that make them synonymous. Of course, they are not. All Hindus are not Indians, and all Indians are not Hindus. Strictly using the term *Hindu* to refer only to those whose religion accepts the authority of the Vedas helps keep this confusion of terms from arising. This second response is the scriptural and liturgical definition of Hinduism.

3. Hinduism Is a Family of Faiths

The third part of the answer to “Who is a Hindu?” and “What is Hinduism?” is that Hinduism is a religion comprised of four primary sectarian traditions, known in Sanskrit as *mata*: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism. For Saivites, God is Siva. For Shaktas, Goddess Shakti is supreme. For Vaishnavites, Lord Vishnu is God. For Smartas—who see all Deities as reflections of the One God—the choice of Deity is left to the devotee. In other words, Hinduism is not just a one faith but a family of myriad faiths, which hold such divergent beliefs that each is a complete and independent religion. Yet, they share a vast heritage of culture and belief: karma, dharma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, temple worship, sacraments, manifold Deities, the guru-*shishya* tradition and a reliance on the Vedas as scriptural authority.

Grasping this overview of Hinduism's structure is essential to gain a clear understanding of the contemporary Hindu temple. I have met many Hindus, particularly in North America, who find the multiplicity of Deities present in many temples to be a source of confusion. This is even more the case in temples that have Deities from Saivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism all in the same hall. An understanding of the four traditions can provide worshipers with valuable insights into the quandary, making it clear which parts of a temple are traditionally Vaishnava, for example, and

Three layers of wisdom: Our three pieces of art depict: 1) Hinduism as the innate, eternal truth ultimately sought by every soul; 2) the Indian religious tradition that accepts the Vedas as scriptural authority; 3) a family of four primary sectarian faiths

which represent the other denominations.

Including the denominations of sectarian worship in answering the question “Who is a Hindu?” also helps distinguish the Hindu from the non-Hindu who is studying Hindu philosophy or practicing yoga. The importance of this distinction may not be readily apparent. Like other religions, Hinduism has a hierarchy of beings in the inner worlds who work with those in the physical world who are Hindus by birth or conversion. This working together of the inner and outer worlds happens most fully in the temple. In those sacred precincts the Deity and the multitude of angelic beings, or devas, are able to bless, uplift and purify devotees. Those who hold a Hindu philosophy but have not fully entered the faith do not receive the same blessings from the Deity, as they have not given the Deity permission to work with them in this way. Permission is given when one formally joins the Hindu religion. It is also important to mention that Hindus new to the religion through birth or conversion do not simply join Hinduism. Rather, they join one of Hinduism's denominations and receive a traditional name through the *namakarana samskara*, name-giving sacrament.

Here are some insights from Gurudeva on blessings being received from the Deity: “The Gods can be and are seen by mature souls through an inner perception they have awakened. This psychic awakening is the first initiation into religion. Every Hindu devotee can sense the Gods, even if he cannot yet inwardly see them. This is possible through the subtle feeling nature. He can feel the presence of the Gods within the temple, and he can indirectly see their influence in his life.”

We offer this explanation as a catalyst and encourage readers to send letters to the editor sharing additional reflections on what makes a Hindu a Hindu.



LETTERS

About Arranged Marriage

THE SUGGESTION THAT ALL OR EVEN most couples whose marriages have been arranged are not actually happy ("About Arranged Marriage," Letters, Jul/Aug/Sep, 2005) is not only misleading but also inaccurate. Although many in the West and a few urbanites in the East tend to deride arranged marriages as backward and primitive, they definitely offer many advantages, provided we believe that the basis of a human being is his/her stability in family life. Cultures that practice arranged marriage place more emphasis on integrity, diligence, humility, generosity and, above all, tolerance, and less on love, sex and physical beauty. They are married based on practical reasons and believe in working and building love after marriage. There can be no other matter so significant in shaping their children's future than having them decide whom to marry. Because arranged marriages tend to be the union of two families and not simply the union of two individuals, they provide checks and balances against problems, such as infidelity, alcoholism and gambling, that are likely to cause a marital breakdown. Are all in-laws outlaws? I don't think so, at least based on what I have seen so far. They often serve as built-in babysitters who can impart confidence in children. The basic premise of a joint or extended family is interdependence and not independence, as is the case with most nuclear families.

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THE SAME PEOPLE THAT TREAT THEIR daughters-in-law as slaves or second-class citizens cannot stand to see their own daughters get the same abusive treatment from the hands of her in-laws. I believe the problem is the lack of education and understanding of the purpose of life in this transitory world. Everyone is responsible for creating bad karma by allowing negative energy to take control of their lives. I believe in arranged marriages, provided they are done between two families that are compatible spiritually. If this is not the case, the marriage will not be successful in the long run, especially when children are born. What values will the children have? What will be the guidelines used for their upbringing? Vijayshree speaks so highly of the Western couples, as to how they live so happily, but sometimes outer looks can be very deceiving. If Western culture is so good, then why are people from Western culture heading toward other religions and cultures in search for peace?

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Temple Vandalism

RECENTLY A HINDU TEMPLE WAS VANDALIZED by local kids, a problem that has been occurring in different communities across America. I feel that such things will not happen if our temples become a part of the community. For example, a temple in our area had a big celebration. A couple of police officers had been hired to manage traffic while everyone was inside eating dinner. I reminded the coordinator that we should take some food out to the police officers, which they did. This little gesture went a long way. The local children who damaged the temple didn't feel that it is part of the community, so they targeted it. A good solution to this problem would be to invite the children in the neighborhood to come to a party at the temple once or twice a year. This way the children feel connected to the temple.

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Just Say "Hindu"

IN REFERENCE TO SWAMI SHANKARANANDA's article ("Confessions of a Western Hindu," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2005), if you are a follower of the traditions represented by Hinduism, it is all right to be called a Hindu, maybe with some qualification, like Western Hindu. To a newcomer, aside from the wealth of spirituality and philosophical knowledge, Hinduism harbors connotations of historical societal imperfections, the remnants of which still exist, for example in the caste system. But only Hinduism has so many mystical holy men and women on the path of God that none else can match. A person accepting parts of Hindu culture, such as yoga or meditation, may or may not identify with Hinduism, but a person who totally accepts the Hindu tradition should identify fully with it, finding a comfortable name for it as suggested above.

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WESTERN HINDUS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT receiving a low status in the Hindu fold. They are also denied by some the possibility of ever becoming Hindus. Exclusion of Westerners from some temples and the refusal to admit them as Hindus by some orthodox priests are not major difficulties. Untouchability is indeed a challenge for Hindus, in India and abroad. The derogatory terms "idol worship" and "idolatry," coming from the British Raj, are still sometimes used and should be countered. *Murti* puja (image worship) is really a unique and glorious feature of Hinduism. I don't prefer the term *Western Hindu* because it suggests a cleav-

age between Western Hindus and Indian Hindus, a division along ethnic lines. My view is that a Western Hindu should identify himself as a Hindu. Then one can proceed to specify the denomination, if necessary. If you start out describing yourself meticulously as a Vaishnava *bhakta* or a Kashmir Saiva or any other in order to circumvent the problem, it will lead to much confusion and a misconception that these are separate religions, when they are really offshoots of one central religion, Vedic Hinduism.

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AS A WESTERNER WHO EMBRACED HINDUISM almost a decade ago, I identified strongly with Swami Shankarananda's article. I am often puzzled by Westerners who clearly follow Hinduism yet are hesitant to identify themselves as Hindu. I'll identify my specific path and guru to people who would know them, but for others it's much easier to just say "Hindu." Some Westerners take a mental step back at the exotic label, but I am happy to do my bit to demystify and clarify it.

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Organ Transplants

I AM A HINDU PHYSICIAN WITH A SPECIAL interest in heart transplantation, and there are several statements in your article ("Hinduism's View of Organ Transplants," Jul/Aug/Sep, 2005) that I disagree with. I am specifically referring to the statements implying that a transplanted organ will prevent the donor's soul from its next incarnation, and that by transplanting an organ we are preventing the recipient's soul from fulfilling its karma. Hindus believe that all living entities have a body and a soul, or *atma*. While the two are very dependent on each other, they are also distinct entities. The *atma* is eternal, while the body is not. The *atma* is not bound to a single organ or part of the body, therefore if the body is cremated except for an organ that was donated, it should have no effect on the liberation of the soul from the dead body. Modern medicine does not try to prevent a soul from fulfilling its karma, rather it tries to help make the person and soul stronger by recovering from a disease.

When you ask anyone who has received a transplant, they are eternally grateful for the improvement and second chance in their life. The biggest problem with organ transplantation is the lack of donors. This has led to the increase in the organ black market. As Hindus, we should embrace organ transplantation as a way to help others once our bodies are dead. It is the *atma*, not the body, that has sig-

nificance after death, and therefore if donating an organ can help another person's karma, we should strongly endorse transplantation.

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✓ *The article did not say that a transplant would "prevent the donor's soul from its next incarnation." It said it "may interfere with his moving on to the next incarnation" and explored the Hindu view of karma as it relates to sharing body parts and the mystical implications of this growing medical practice.*

A Treasure Trove

YOUR MAGAZINE HAS TOUCHED A DEEP chord in me. I went through the archives and read the past issues. Each surpassed the other in the sheer magic woven into the articles. HINDUISM TODAY is surely a treasure trove of knowledge and information on myriad topics and a fitting tribute to the oldest religion in the world.

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In Need of Hindu Reform

OVER THE YEARS I HAVE BECOME AWARE of the rapidly increasing exploitation of Hindu weaknesses by international Christian groups in an effort to convert vulnerable Hindus to the Christian religion. Pope John Paul II visited India in November 1999 and declared, "Just as the first millennium saw the cross firmly planted in the soil of

Europe and the second in that of America and Africa, so may the third Christian millennium witness a great harvest of faith on this vast and vital continent." In that context, I have become aware of a grand scale, concerted effort by the Christian leadership to pour large financial and human resources into the conversion movement in India. As a result, young volunteers are descending in large numbers to study the local culture, way of living, language and vulnerabilities to effectively carry out the campaign. In addition, there are converted Christian groups through whom this underground movement is carried out in the local language and mode of operation, with tremendous support and backing from their parent organizations in the West. In contrast, I sense a sort of apathy and inaction, a lack of united awareness and leadership in the Hindu community. The gold treasure of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and culture on which Hindus sleep may be at the brink of extinction. Once the young Hindu next generation is brainwashed, the mission would be accomplished for the missionaries.

I propose three points of reform to defend against these efforts. Recently I saw the movie "Veer Savarkar" and was very impressed that he tried to persuade Hindus to abolish the caste system. This led me to question the scriptural basis for, and the prevailing interpretation of, the caste system. I have come to the conclusion that the caste system is not preached by God in Hindu scriptures, but was started as a result of misinterpretation of the scriptures and was perpetuated because of the indifferent and possibly selfish attitude

of influential Hindus.

Secondly, I have studied the *Gita* and *Srimad Bhagavatam* and have been bothered by the belittling remarks about women at many places. Convinced that God cannot hold such unjust, unwarranted and biased views, I think it is the need of our time to denounce and possibly remove such remarks that create division in our community and waste valuable talents.

Lastly, I have visited India several times in the past six years and have seen children attending missionary schools in far greater numbers than when I grew up. The missionary schools seem to be flourishing in spite of their high tuition fees and strict rules, and with support from local politicians. Because of my sensitivity to the brainwashing and alienation from our religion that can easily be perpetrated on children of impressionable age, and the anti-Hindu attitude the same young generation may carry when they grow up, I wondered why Hindu leaders were not making a concerted effort to start equal or better Hindu schools in every corner of India.

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or e-mailed to: letters@hindu.org

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.
✉ INDICATES LETTERS RECEIVED VIA E-MAIL

Our Men and Women of Vision

How to help us find more great writers

THE FOUNDER OF HINDUISM TODAY, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, was so pleased with our team of journalists that, in the February 1999 issue, he dedicated an editorial to them. He praised their "visionary nature and inherent sensitivity, far beyond expectations." He lauded them as major players in the unfolding story of HINDUISM TODAY, its success and impact. Today, seven years later, we appreciate them more than ever for their savvy contributions, a good example of which is Rajiv Malik's superb article on the Tirupati temple on page 18 of this issue.

As Hinduism continues to blossom in India and everywhere, HINDUISM TODAY will need to bolster this team with more writers in diverse parts of the world. We will need the means to remunerate them

generously and send them on assignment liberally, to report from wherever stories are happening, now and in the future.

A Hinduism Today Production Fund has been established especially for this purpose. As it grows in abundance, it will provide our editors with regular and ample grants to hire the world's best writers, consultants, photographers, scholars and more. This fund is a part of the Hindu Heritage Endowment. You can join in this ongoing and most worthwhile effort. Please consider becoming a Benefactor of HINDUISM TODAY by making the Fund a beneficiary in your estate plan of a gift of \$5,000 or more—in your will, in your life insurance, in a revocable living trust or charitable remainder trust. Please contact us and ask for the Hinduism Today Production Fund flyer.



Six among our brilliant team of writers: (clockwise from top left) Choodamani Sivaram, Bangalore; Lavina Melwani, New York; Rajiv Malik, Delhi; G.K. Nair, Kerala; Archana Dongre, Los Angeles; Dr. Hari Bansh Jha, Nepal

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QUOTES & QUIPS

To reach your goal the fastest, every day make a new attempt; every day feel that you are a fresh flower.

Sri Chinmoy, renowned spiritual leader, author, poet, artist, musician and athlete

Self-surrender is the supreme condition of winning the universal life. Men will part with their wealth, their rights, and even their lives, at the call of religion. But when you ask them to exchange their human self for the divine self, which is exactly what all great religions want them to do, they refuse. For the wine of mortality has a terrible fascination for most of us—and yet by flinging myself into the blazing fire of Universal Reality, I do not lose myself. I emerge out of the ordeal, shining and deathless. Brothers and sisters, come, let us strive to become immortals by losing ourselves in the Supreme Light. **Mahakavi Subrahmanya Bharati** (1882-1921), great Tamil poet and Indian patriot

Have you ever thought what would happen if temples were Americanized? Two types of *prasadam*, or blessed food, will be available—normal *prasadam* and diet *prasadam*.

The priest will not ask for your name and birth star before an *archana* anymore. Your home page URL will do. No more *aratis* due to fire hazard. No more bells due to noise pollution. Sound and light will be delivered via headphones and virtual reality goggles. The puja tray passed around for donations is equipped with a credit card scanner. Dog-eared Sanskrit priest manuals are replaced with laptops. Sponsors of pujas will be allowed to display a banner ad on the temple website. As soon as the technology is available, priests will do home blessings by holographic projection without leaving the temple. Similarly, busy devotees will be able to be present at mandatory family ceremonies from their office.

India of the *Vedas* entertained a respect for women amounting to worship; a fact which we seem little to suspect in Europe when we accuse the extreme East of having de-

nied the dignity of woman, and of having only made her an instrument of pleasure and of passive obedience. **Louis Jaccotot** (1837-1890), French author of the Bible in India: Hindoo Origin of Hebrew and Christian Revelation

Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened. **Winston Churchill** (1874-1965), Prime Minister of England during World War II

Joys and sorrows are time-born and cannot last. Therefore, do not be perturbed by these. The greater the difficulties and obstructions, the more intense will be your endeavor to cling to His feet and the more will your prayer increase from within. And when the time is ripe, you will gain mastery over this power. **Anandamayi Ma** (1896-1982), God-intoxicated Bengali saint

DID YOU KNOW?

Hindu Terms Are in the Dictionary

WORDS LIKE ASHRAM, chakra, dharma, guru, karma, mantra and yoga have been fixtures in the English language for decades. But did you know that they are in the English dictionary? Since the advent of online dictionaries, HINDUISM TODAY's editorial staff has periodically looked up Hindu terms, noticing a steady growth in the number of them which have officially become part of the ever-growing English language.

This is likely because of the higher profile of Hindu studies and interest in yoga, meditation and ayurveda in America. We also find this expansion of the English vocabulary significant because it bears on a traditional convention among printers and publishers, which we follow, of italicizing words which aren't in the main language of the text. For example, *archana* is not in the English dictionary, so it is typeset in *italics*. As soon as a word appears in the

dictionary, such as puja, it loses this special treatment.

Not only are there over a hundred Sanskrit words in the English dictionary now, they are in most cases accurately defined. For example, the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary* defines moksha as "release from samsara and liberation from karma together with the attainment of Nirvana for the Hindu or kaivalya for the Jain; salvation from the

bondage of finite existence." It defines prana as "a life breath or vital principle in Vedic and later Hindu religion; any of the three or more vital currents; the principle of life moving in the human body." Sadhana is defined as "Hindu religious training or discipline through which an individual attains samadhi."



Frank and Ernest



We must respect other religions even as we respect our own. Mere tolerance thereof is not enough. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869-1948)

Swami Bua Ji, age 115, asked a devotee: What is the Magna Carta of Hinduism? **Devotee:** I don't know, Swamiji. **SB:** Then what is a Magna Carta? **D:** It is a law, Swamiji, and it means "Great Charter." **SB:** What does it contain? **D:** This English document contains freedoms and lofty ideals of governance. **SB:** Right. Then the Magna Carta of Hinduism is *A no bhadrak kratavo yantu vishvatah* (Rig Veda 1.89.i), which means "Let noble thoughts come to us from every side."

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. *From A Return to Love by Marianne Williamson*

76% of doctors in the US believe in God (83% of all Americans do). But compared

with the general public, M.D.s are: 26 times as likely to be Hindu, 6 times as likely to be Buddhist, 5 times as likely to be Muslim. **Journal of General Internal Medicine**

Mud thrown is ground lost.

The monotony and solitude of a quiet life stimulates the creative mind. **Albert Einstein** (1879-1955)

At a national and international level, we will enjoy more peace as we become more

tolerant. Religious leaders can help by teaching their congregations how to live in a world of differences without feeling threatened, without forcing their ways or will on others. World bodies can make laws which deplore and work to prevent crimes of violence. It is only when the higher-nature people are in charge that peace will truly come. There is no other way, because the problems of conflict reside within the low-minded group who only know retaliation as a way of life. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

Avoidance of Killing

Tirukural 322: Of all virtues summed by ancient sages, the foremost are to share one's food and to protect all living creatures.

324: What is the good way? It is the path that reflects on how it may avoid killing any living creature.

327: Refrain from taking precious life from any living being, even to save your own life.

328: By sacrifice of life, some gain great wealth and welfare, but great men scorn such odious gains.

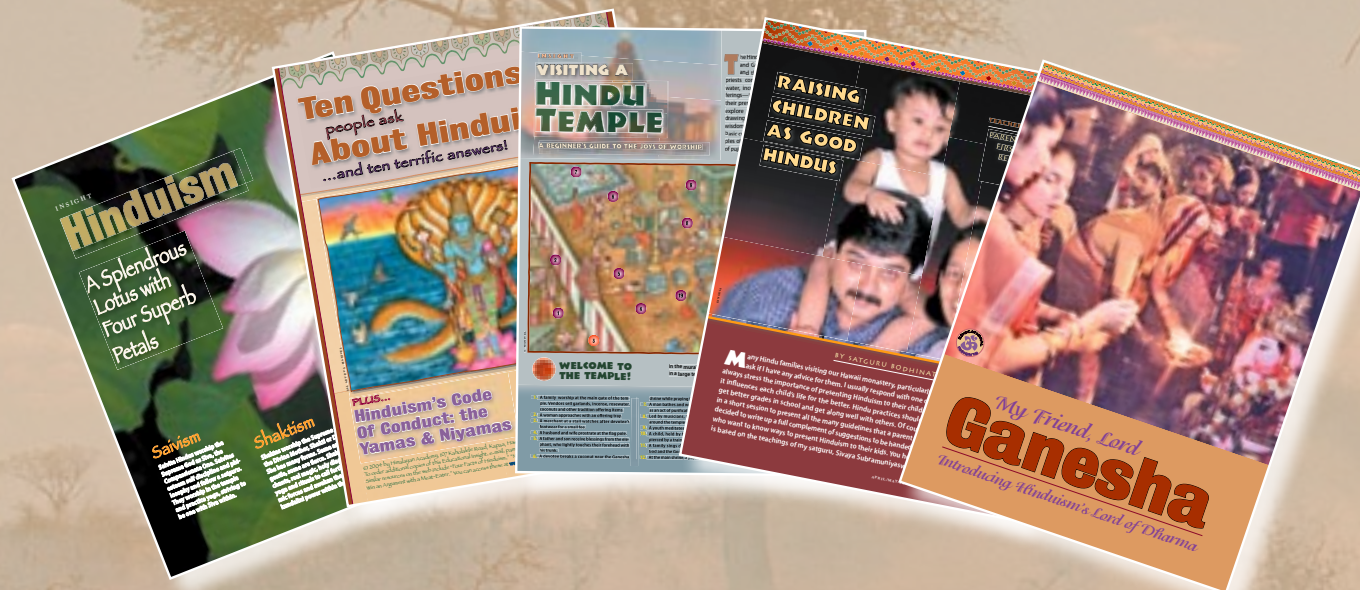
329: Those whose trade is killing creatures are deemed defiled by men who know the defiling nature of being mean.





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FROM THE VEDAS

Apprehending the Auspicious

The Hindu prayer to hear and see that which is divinely uplifting

EVERY UPANISHAD BEGINS WITH AN invocation for blessings followed by the famed triple repetition of “shanti” or peace, called the Shanti Pada. Swami Chinmayananda expounds here on the significance of the first verse of the Mundaka Upanishad and the eternal values inherent in our holy Vedas.

No Upanishad study ever started without the guru and the disciple chanting together the Peace Invocation, a common prayer. They prayed for the cultural evolution of the entire kingdom of beings. This national character of the Vedic period is stamped so faithfully in the words of the Shanti Stanza in each of the Upanishads. In this great prayer of the Vedic seers that they should hear and see nothing but goodness and purity, we have the *Das Kapital* of the Hindus. If each one in a society or a community is to ardently and sincerely pray so as to meet with only auspiciousness and act for the same, in such a country, at such an era of culture, jails will be redundant, slum areas will be unknown, poverty unimaginable, disease a mere exception. From the state of affairs available today, we may despair and fail even to visualize that such a perfect spiritual communism would ever be possible in the world, but this seems to be the pattern aimed at by the *rishis* of old, and their prayers clearly indicate to what perfections they brought their visions, in their own times, as facts realized. They also never complained of life, but prayed the Lord of the Universe bless them to live their entire allotted span of life in all health and perfect vitality. No Peace Invocation concludes without thrice invoking Shanti. The three repetitions are, it is explained by the acharyas, addressed to the three groups of probable obstacles in scriptural study. They are the Godsent (*adi daivika*), such as lightning, thunder; or phenomenal (*adi-bhautika*), such as fire, floods, landslides, etc; or purely subjective (*adhyatmika*), such as inertia, lack of faith, insincerity, etc., arising from our own negativities.

Unlike the philosophy and the philosophical textbooks in Europe, in India the Upanishads were not commodities for growing rich or for earning applauses. To the West, philosophy is one of the avenues for self-gratification and self-satisfaction; in the East, to the *rishis* and their true children, the Hindus, philosophy is for Self-adoration and Self-attainment. The *rishis* only heard the



The Vedic *rishis* invoked Pushan, the Sun God, to bless us

mantras from within themselves as though spoken by someone else. The term *shruti* itself means “that which is heard.” Every disciple, when established in his own subjective experience of the Truth indicated by his own master, became himself a master. When he, in turn, explained and expressed that state of experience to seekers, he did not claim the discovery but only quoted his own guru. Thus, our scriptural textbooks preserved their purity and chastity until today and have come down to us in the hierarchy of teacher-disciple generations.

We are not to accept any declarations of the intellect and the mind as part and parcel of our eternal Vedas. If we do so, we too would have a philosophy that is changing every fifteen years as in the West, where, with every changing vicissitude of national life, with every war, with every revolution, there is a thorough rearrangement of material values lived. Consequently, there is a change in the attitude of the mind and intellect toward life. With every disturbance in the brain cells in kaleidoscopic variety, we get a library of philosophies, from Plato to date. But in India, the eternal Vedas and the Upanishadic truths are as true today as they were when they were taught in the valleys of the sacred Ganges. We may have progressed and thoroughly changed the external setup in the world and the consequent inner psychological and intellectual assessments of things, but the experience of sleep is not different at any time; so too, the external experience of Godhood. This is the goal preached in the Upanishads. It is not changing or changeable, whatever be the outside change in our gross life.

COMMENTARY BY SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA

SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA (1970-1993), Vedantist writer, lecturer, translator, dynamic spiritual leader and Hindu renaissance founder of Chinmaya Mission International

The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, *shruti*, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1,200 BCE), Bible New Testament (100 CE), Koran (630 CE) or Zend Avesta (600 BCE). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 BCE.

Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.1

SEEKING THE LORD OF SEVEN HILLS



TWO PHOTOS COURTESY TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS



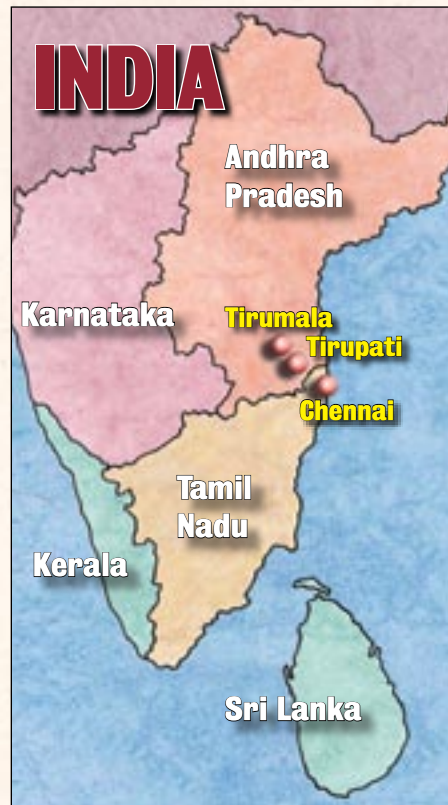
Crowned with gold and jewels: Photographs of the temple's main deity are not allowed, but the three-foot-tall utsava murti (parade deity) of Lord Balaji (above center) is an exact replica. He is flanked by His consorts, Sridevi (left) and Bhudevi (right). (Facing page) Tirumala's gold-plated main temple tower is radiant at dusk against the mountainous terrain of Andhra Pradesh.

Join us on pilgrimage to India's grand Vishnu temple famous for its extraordinary wealth and undying service to the poor

BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

ALTHOUGH THE VIPs WERE PERCHED ON an elevated entryway 20 feet above the ground, they were still locked into a crowd that seemed to have a mind of its own as it inched forward like creeping lava toward the main sanctum of the temple. This throng of pilgrims had been tightly packed together for hours, waiting to catch just a glimpse of their beloved Lord Balaji. Although the heat was almost unbearable, many of these devotees were chanting, "Govinda, Govinda," with frenzied intensity.

Suddenly, a young boy appeared near the VIPs. No one could see where he had come from. He was disabled and deformed. An old lady was with him, perhaps his grandmother. As the chanting escalated to a crescendo, the lady and boy turned toward the other pilgrims and raised their folded hands in the prayerful gesture. As if on cue, the pilgrims showered hundreds of coins and currency notes upon their heads. A few minutes later, more disabled children appeared—seemingly out of no where. They, too, were blessed in the same fashion.



Getting oriented: Although many pilgrims approach the Tirumala Balaji temple in from Chennai in Tamil Nadu, Tirupati and Tirumala are actually in Andhra Pradesh. The internationally famous temple (below) attracts millions of pilgrims every year.

Welcome to the Venkateshwara temple of Tirumala in Andhra Pradesh. Many ardent Hindus live by the conviction that the mere sight of this temple's central icon of Lord Balaji assures spiritual transformation. Having now had the experience of seeing this deity myself, I can honestly say that I understand this sentiment completely and most certainly hope that it is true. According to legend, the Balaji image in this most holy place is *svayambhu*, which means it was not installed by man, but miraculously manifested by God Himself.

Constructed in the ninth century and lavishly extolled in ancient Hindu religious literature, the temple is nestled 125 miles inland from Chennai, deep in the postcard beauty of South India's Seshachalam mountains. It is certainly not surprising that such a special place would attract more than twenty million pilgrims a year. Balaji is a form of Lord Vishnu who is also frequently referred to—even in this temple—as Venkateshwara, Govinda, Srinivasa and Narayana.

Tirumala is inseparably linked to a much larger town nearby named Tirupati. A half-million permanent residents reside in Tirupati, as compared with about 10,000 living in Tirumala. Because pilgrims traveling to Tirumala from Chennai must pass through Tirupati, it has become an important pilgrim destination in its own right. Tirupati is also home to the headquarters of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), a mammoth organization that employs over twelve thousand people and oversees the business and

management of not only the Balaji temple in Tirumala but eleven other temples in the surrounding area.

One of the world's richest religious institutions, the TTD maintains a high-powered temple trust board that is presided over by an Executive Officer, and, under him, two Joint Executive Officers—one for Tirumala and the other for Tirupati. These three head up a fleet of deputies and assistants who attend to the institution's various concerns, including temple management, sculptural construction, cultural activities and a multitude of responsibilities associated with managing a large number of hospitals and schools. The TTD ensures that at least 50 percent of Tirumala's energy needs are self-generated—mostly from state-of-the-art windmills and solar paneling.

Coping with thousands of pilgrims seven days a week, 365 days a year, is a huge challenge for the TTD Public Relations Department. It was this group of expert people-handlers that we got to know well when we—photographer Thomas Kelly and I—visited Tirupati and Tirumala in the intense heat of early June on assignment from HINDUISM TODAY. Truth be told, I was under Balaji's magic spell the instant I was asked to do this story.

As we walked the dusty roads of Tirupati on our way to Tirumala, a sea of shaven heads stretched out in every direction. Everyone was on the move, coming from or going to the famous seven hills of Balaji's abode. While Tirupati is permeated with

well-advertised liquor and meat shops, and the city's hotels feature bars and non-vegetarian restaurants, pilgrims passing through this town on their way to Tirumala will not purchase meat and alcohol during festival celebrations. Such items (including cigarettes) are prohibited by local law during these special times. Police actually perform luggage checks at designated points between Tirupati and Tirumala to confiscate banned items.

Our Work Becomes Worship

Thomas and I had no idea what to expect when we first arrived in Tirumala. Although formal arrangements for our visit had been made far in advance through our HINDUISM TODAY headquarters in Hawaii, our first impression of the temple was so overwhelming that we were immediately lost in a blissfully divine amnesia of sorts. Fortunately for us, a friendly man named T. Ravi was conveniently on hand to rescue us. After briefly introducing himself as a representative of the TTD Public Relations Department, he invited us to attend a *puja* (worship ceremony) that was just about to begin in the main sanctum of the temple.

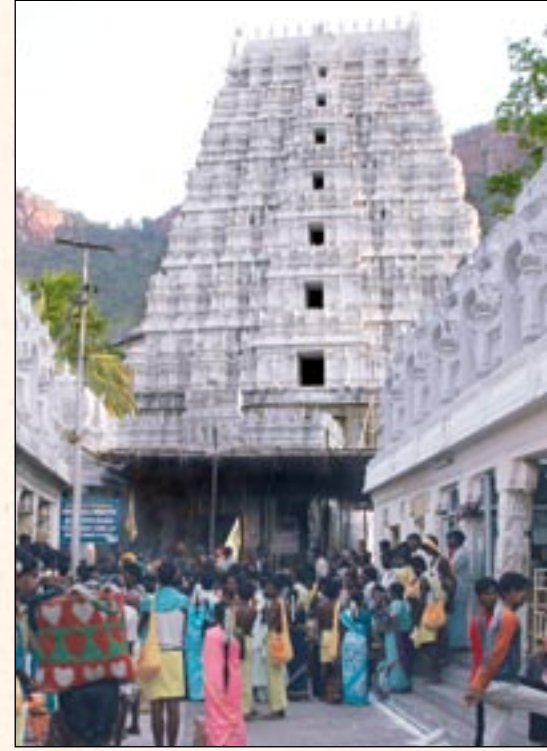
Following the temple's strict protocol, we left our shoes, cell phones, tape recorders and cameras in the safe care of our hosts before proceeding to the ancient Pushkarni Lake near the temple. At the lake, as we purified ourselves before receiving the *darshan* (sight) of Lord Balaji, it suddenly became apparent to me that we could not

possibly do an appropriate story on a spiritual place like this without immersing ourselves in worship as true pilgrims. In all of its majestic elegance, the real charm of this magic abode of Balaji is obviously its ethereal *bhava* (devotional spirit), more than its legendary fame, food and fortune.

Although this temple is commonly regarded as one of the most glamorous and charismatic pilgrimage destinations in the world, it is also extolled and sometimes criticized for its fabulous wealth. Yet, as I stand here in this glorious place, I am not mystified that the fifty thousand pilgrims who visit Tirumala each day during religious festivals feel so uplifted and fulfilled that they don't mind spending or giving any amount of money. The source of their inspiration is obvious. This is a powerful place. Its affluence is not nearly as much the result of the entrepreneurial expertise of local businessmen as it is the spiritual passion experienced by its deeply inspired pilgrim guests.

Pushkarni Lake is surrounded on all sides by concrete steps and shrines. As we arrived, a large number of devotees were taking dainty dips as they quietly chanted the names of Lord Vishnu. Because the lake is considered as sacred as the temple, pilgrims are discouraged from taking full baths, washing clothes or using soap in any way. To compensate for this restriction, elaborate bathing facilities are provided nearby.

Thomas and I encountered interesting devotees at every turn. Just talking to these



Preparing to meet the Lord: Hearty pilgrims assemble in the township of Alipiri at the elegantly-carved entrance-tower to a stone-paved path that they will follow for eight miles, mostly up hill, to reach the Balaji temple in Tirumala. After their rigorous journey, they will take a ritual bath in the holy Pushkarni Lake (below).



ALL PHOTOS THOMAS KELLY



exhilarated people turned out to be an adventure in itself. As different as they all were, they all had one thing in common: They loved Lord Balaji.

"I have been coming here for the *darshan* of Lord Balaji since childhood," said Rama Chandra Murthy, a 38-year-old software consultant from Hyderabad. "At least once a year, our whole family comes together. We are all devoted to Lord Balaji. He is like our father. He watches over us. When I pray to him, I do not ask for anything in particular. Things just happen automatically."

The Journey Begins

After our ritual dip in the Pushkarni Lake, Ravi and other TTD representatives helped us move gracefully into the outer portion of the mammoth temple compound. We were elated that our first sight of the Lord would be a VIP *darshan*. It was a grand honor indeed.

We began our lengthy journey to the main sanctum through a complex maze of long, dark corridors. After hurrying along, ducking and dodging through these tunnels for about 15 minutes, we suddenly found ourselves immersed in a thick crowd of devotees—more VIPs as it turned out. Immediately, we were stopped by a security official who asked Thomas to sign a declaration form stating that he has faith in the Hindu Gods. Even as he was quickly scribbling his signature, we were being rushed forward down yet another dark passageway. It was not like we had any control over how we moved. We were being impelled by the rolling power of the crowd.

The further we walked, the more crowded it became. Soon, we were all so tightly packed together that just breathing was difficult. What little air there was hung heavily around us like wet heat. Just when I thought I could not bear such restrictive austerity any longer, we emerged up and out of our cavernous environment onto a small overpass.

Through the cage-like fencing that bordered both sides of this bridge, we were able to inhale some fresh air and observe a large portion of the inner temple complex from an elevation of about 20 feet above the other pilgrims. It was like being in the crow's nest of a battleship. Everyone was chanting, "Govinda, Govinda." Somehow, in the confusion of it all, there was a spiritual feeling of peace and contentment.

The pilgrims varied in age. The young were tending to the old. Weary mothers were carrying their smallest children while leading others by the hand. There were no tourists, so Thomas was attracting a lot of attention.

I casually asked a man next to me how he was holding up in the discomfort of our waiting. He surprised me with a beaming grin as he said, "This morning I was walking up the footpath to the temple. It was a most arduous journey. When I reached the outer compound of the temple, I thought to myself that I would never do this again. Now, all of my fatigue is gone and I feel completely refreshed. In fact, I plan to perform *anga pradakshana* (praying while rolling the physical body) around the main sanctum."

After crossing the bridge we were back down on the ground level and being forced into two narrow lanes, each about three feet wide. We were with the VIPs in one lane. Everyone else was in the other lane, moving at a slower rate.

To our left there was a concrete wall—to our right, more iron fencing. About a dozen industrious food and beverage hawkers were busy trying to sell us water, cold drinks and

(animal mounts). Awestruck and amazed, I wondered to myself how I could ever possibly write about all of this. Thomas, of course, was deeply regretting that he had not been allowed to bring his camera. All we could do right now was try to take it all in, one little piece at a time.

Here and there, we spotted fleets of robed priests moving this way and that, attending to duties and preparing to perform *puja* (ceremony). Eventually, two of these *pujaris* invited Thomas and me into a large hall to take a closer look at the priceless works of art inside. There I took the opportunity to talk with a bright young man who had joined us on our spontaneous detour.

I asked him what inspired him to come to Tirumala. "Well, my own thinking is that the Lord helps those who help themselves," he replied. "I try to work hard on my own first. Then I pray. Right now I am doing well as a student and hope to be a successful businessman. I know I have tried my best in school. So I feel it is okay to ask Lord Balaji for His grace."

Soon enough, the three of us were again mingling with the others in the queue. All of this time, the crowd had been moving slowly forward like an unstoppable elephant. I could not help pondering how long this might have taken had we not been given the "VIP shortcut."

The area around the main sanctum was scintillating with an energy that felt electric. Many devotees in our group were still chanting, "Govinda, Govinda." Devotees coming out of the main sanctum, having received their *darshan*, were enthusiastically joining our chanting. It was a joyous moment of jubilation. The lines of devotees, coming and going from Lord Balaji's abode, were now only a few feet apart.

Nearby, some young ladies were offering prayers and prostrating to Goddesses at side shrines. I overheard a woman right behind me whisper to her relative that they were praying for happiness in married life.

As the main sanctum finally became visible, the excitement of the pilgrims escalated. They began to chant louder and faster, "Govinda Govinda." Finally, their worship reached a frenzied culmination. The people behind me were shoving more forcefully, and we were moving more quickly. A slight sense of panic fluttered through the crowd. "I wonder if these *darshan* sessions ever get out of control," I thought. Suddenly, my musing was cut short. Just as we passed through the last door, He appeared. There He was—Lord Balaji, in all of His magnificent splendor. What an unforgettable moment!

The pitch-black granite *murti* of the Deity was mesmerizing. Although the delicate-



ALL PHOTOS THOMAS KELLY

Off to the temple: Devotees set out from the Pilgrims Amenity Center near Alipiri where accommodations for 3,000 pilgrims are available free of charge

eatables. The cold drinks were quite popular because of the heat.

For about an hour we continued moving slowly, covering a distance of perhaps half a mile. Finally, we reached the front gates of the innermost temple. Right beyond the entrance, water for feet washing was flowing from one side of the giant doorway to the other. "This is such an imaginative idea," I thought to myself, "making feet washing so unavoidable. Very ingenious." To my knowledge, no other temple in India has a feature like this.

Approaching the Lord

Once inside the inner temple, it was like we were transported back to some ancient time. A towering hallway, framed with elaborately carved pillars, stretched far to our left and right. This corridor and others like it connect grand, spacious halls filled with golden icons of Gods, Goddesses and their *vahanas*



Where God first stepped down: Peeking out of the dense forests covering the seven hills surrounding Balaji's abode, one particularly auspicious high point is legendary as the place Lord Vishnu first stepped down upon Earth before taking residence in Tirumala. Today, this site is commemorated with a small shrine called Srivari Padalu where devotees perform their own puja (worship ceremony) to a granite carving of the Lord's holy feet before enjoying perhaps the region's most spectacular view of Tirumala and the Balaji temple far below.





The gathering place: Thousands of pilgrims informally congregate around a humble peepul tree (above left) near the Balaji temple in the heart of Tirumala. Here they can rest before going into the temple, purchase food at nearby shops, ask questions at information booths and even view video coverage of ceremonies going on inside the temple on close circuit TV. Near this peepul tree, there is a large, open-air pavilion with water, bath and sleeping facilities (below) where pilgrims can relax any time, 24 hours a day, free of charge.

ly carved detail of the image was exquisitely ornate, most of this intricacy was lost beneath the flower garlands that had been stacked high upon His head and shoulders. He seemed so colossally massive and vitally alive. How could it be that He was only seven feet tall?

I stood before the Lord for only about three minutes. Not long. Yet it was a three minutes I will never forget. He touched my heart and soul. I was overwhelmed. Although this experience was intensely personal, and for that reason, not something I feel inclined to describe, I will say that it introduced me to a unique feeling that, since then, I have frequently referred back to for strength, stability and inspiration.

Directly following our *darshan*, both Thomas and I were completely oblivious to our surroundings. As much as we wanted to stay right there in the sanctum, the same force that had pushed us in was now shoving us out. Before we knew it, we were outside.



ALL PHOTOS THOMAS KELLY

As is often true in life, we had been at the mercy of a force larger than ourselves. One thing is for sure. As far as the Lord of this temple is concerned, each and every devotee is a VIP.

After leaving the sanctum, we found a peaceful spot near the outer perimeter of the temple compound to sit for a few minutes and attempt to recapture the glory of

what had just happened. Yes, the resplendent Lord Balaji was still right there, indelibly etched in my mind, just as I had seen Him. The more I tried to recall His darshan, the more blissful I felt. Such was the power of this *ma-hadeva* (great shining being) who had just changed my life.

There was a policeman standing near us. Because he seemed far more blissfully content than any “peacekeeper” I had ever seen, I introduced myself and asked him what it was like working in this holy place. “I am very happy with this assignment,” he said. “My whole family worships Lord Balaji. They all think that it is a great honor that I have this job. I hope to work here for many years to come. My only ambition is to help the pilgrims in all possible ways.”

24/7: (facing page) Even during non-festival times, Balaji’s peepul tree is surrounded by pilgrims consumed in a frenzy of celebratory activity, even through the night





THOMAS KELLY

A first experience: Many children have their “first head shaving ceremony,” called the *chudakarana samskara*, at the Balaji temple. The purpose of this sometimes disconcerting experience is to foster humility and purity, and to mitigate past karma.

Making Heart-Felt Offerings

As soon as we felt the urge to move on, we joined another group of devotees slowly moving toward the *hundi* (temple offering box). This temple receives so much money that its daily total often makes headlines in newspapers all across India. Many entrepreneurs treat Lord Balaji as their business partner, never forgetting to give Him His share of their profits.

According to an interesting story still told by grandmas throughout South India, the temple's affluence comes from a debt accrued by Lord Balaji Himself. Long ago, it seems, the Lord needed a large sum of money to marry a pretty Goddess named Padmavati. Although he had no trouble borrowing said funds from Kubera, the God of Wealth, the amount was apparently so staggeringly massive that it has still not been fully repaid, even to this day. Hence, some faithful devotees make their temple offerings with the thought that their contributions are helping to clear this Divine debt.

Although it is traditional for a Hindu temple to have a *hundi*, few have one like Tirumala's. Lord Balaji's *hundi* is a large copper bowl, open at the top and covered from opposite sides with two pieces of white canvas that do not overlap in the middle. This gap left between the two pieces of canvas provides a rather large opening for devotees to drop in offerings of various shapes and sizes.

As we awaited our turn to give, we ob-

served that each and every devotee had something valuable to offer. With folded hands and closed eyes, they would make their donations with compelling reverence. I was particularly moved when I saw a wealthy lady remove all the valuables she was wearing, wrap them in a yellow cloth and drop them into the *hundi*.

Scores of TTD employees work in shifts just to count the money and valuables received by the Lord of Seven Hills. These offerings include hair, bangles, jewelry, currency, necklaces, earrings, gold, silver, sugar candy, religious icons, wrist watches, promissory notes, lottery tickets, coins of all denominations and more.

The *hundi*'s contents are emptied twice a day in the presence of officials and devotees. All money received is credited in the Lord's account in several banks. The valuables are sent to the TTD Treasury in Tirupati. Much of the temple's donated wealth is invested in charity projects. A portion of it is also spent on the upkeep of the temple, as well as the preparation of sacred food offerings, which are given to devotees free of charge.

Thomas and I made our humble offerings. I also gave donations on behalf of my friends and relatives in New Delhi.

Balaji's Famous Sweets

Just as we were leaving the temple, we received some small *laddus* (sweets made of wheat, fruit and nuts) as *prashadam* (blessed food offering). Although these mouth-wa-

tering morsels were delicious, they were only a hint of something we had both long awaited. It was now time to try out Tirupati's famous super-size *laddus*. Needless to say, we were itching with anticipation to get our hands on these giant sweets made only here at Lord Balaji's holy feet.

We were entitled to two of these jumbo sweets apiece due to the fact that we had each purchased a hundred-rupee ticket (about two dollars) to enter the temple just hours before.

We had to do a little bit of investigative scouting to actually collect our just desserts. Eventually we spied a conspicuous gathering of folks like us, quite busily involved with something relating to food. Were they making a purchase? These *laddus* were supposed to be free—or at least already paid for. We were told by some vendors standing nearby that these pilgrims were being sold “covers” for *laddus*. These covers were small plastic bags

designed to be used for holding the scrumptiously sticky sweets. A very good idea as it turned out.

After purchasing our bags, we proceeded to the *laddu* distribution counters, which we followed a hungry crowd to find, just around the corner. Hundreds of people were forming yet more queues to receive their two-pound sweet balls from about 12 stands. This time we did not wait long. After just a few short minutes, Thomas and I were walking away, happily devouring our blessed treats.

Sixty million *laddus* are produced in Tirumala every year—just for the Balaji temple. Mammoth ghee-pumping stations and conveyer belts have been constructed for this massive production of Divine sweets.

We had arrived at the temple around three in the afternoon. Now it was six in the evening. Our VIP journey for *darshan* had taken a little over three hours.

Head-Shaving at Tirumala

The Venkateshwara temple of Tirumala is almost as internationally famous for its head shaving as it is for its wealth—and its *laddus*. Every day some 25,000 men, women and children have their locks snipped by temple barbers.

By having their heads shaved in a temple like this, pilgrims strive to bring forward their soulful qualities of humility and purity, demonstrating to God and themselves that they can surrender their lower nature at His holy feet. It is also traditional for very

young children to get their heads shaved for the first time in a temple ceremony called the *chudakarana samskara*. Often, on an auspicious occasions like this, entire families will have their heads shaved.

Looking out over the streets and paths of Tirupati and Tirumala, we saw literally hundreds of people of all ages with newly shaven heads. This is a rare sight—even in India. It was quite an experience to witness perhaps six hundred *sadhus* having their heads shaved before walking to Ujjain along the holy Shipra River for their initiation into renunciate life.

According to one legend, Lord Vishnu took up residence in an anthill near the place now known as Tirumala, for the purpose of performing yogic penance. When His friend, Lord Brahma, observed this noble undertaking, He took the form of a cow and went to Lord Vishnu every day so that Vishnu could be sustained by holy milk while performing His austerities.

The owner of the cow, who did not fully understand this mystical situation and was frustrated that his cow kept wandering off to feed an ascetic, tried to cut the animal with a knife. Because the cow was actually Brahma, the Lord received a wound in the head, resulting in a loss of some hair. When a nearby devotee named Neeladri witnessed this, she quickly rushed forward to offer her own hair to replace what the Lord had just lost. Thus was born the tradition of offering hair to Lord Balaji at Tirumala.

A Visit to the Kalyanakatta Complex

We visited the Kalyanakatta Complex where over twenty-thousand pilgrims have their heads shaved everyday. There we saw hundreds of men, women and children in dozens of queues patiently waiting for their turn with the temple barbers. Although it was an extremely hot afternoon, no one seemed to mind. The barbers, busily taking care of so many patrons, could have easily been going about their work in a frazzled or hectic manner, but they were not. They were cool and calm, even devotional, as they worked. A head shaving here is referred to as a “hair-offering ceremony.”

Crossing through queues of waiting pilgrims and stepping over loose piles of hair, we made our way to a place from which we could closely scrutinize the barbers at work. Although we tried to speak with these fast-moving artisans, communication of any sort was difficult at best. That was fine with us. It was enjoyable just to watch them work. They were quick, efficient and superbly skilled.

It was difficult to walk or even move

Holy sweets: Balaji's famous *laddus* are temple *prashadam* (a holy sacrament) and must therefore be prepared by temple priests

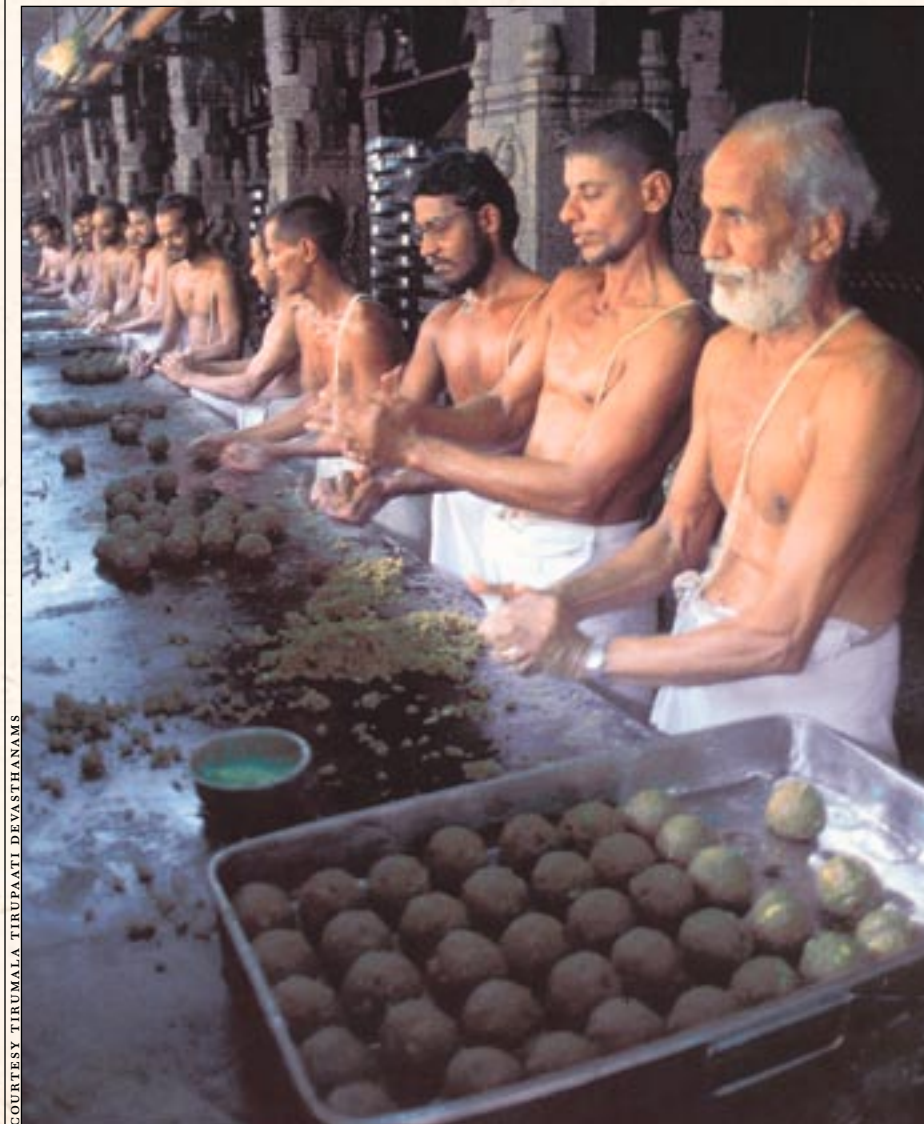
through the rooms of this head-shaving complex. Not only were there a lot of people, but the floor—because of the tangled masses of wet hair—was sticky and slippery. It was easy to see why we were not allowed to take pictures. To someone looking in from the outside, this place might have easily seemed unphotogenic at best.

Barbers chanted “Govinda Govinda” as they began shaving. When they finished, they clasped their hands together, palm to palm, and again intoned “Govinda Govinda.” Armed with only a straight razor, they could adeptly shave even a squirming child in five minutes or less. Women often choose to have a “symbolic” haircut during which only three locks of hair are removed.

After touring the rooms and halls of the entire complex, we met Mr. M.K. Venkateswara Varma, Deputy Executive Officer, TTD. He was in charge of the Kalyanakatta Complex and had agreed to grant us an exclusive interview.

Mr. Varma explained that hair sales bring in about six million US dollars a year. He also clarified that, although the Kalyankatta Complex is not the only place in Tirumala where head-shaving occurs, it was the only one where it is free.

When a colleague of mine in New Delhi came to know that I was in Tirupati, she called me on the telephone to ask if I might purchase some long hair for her while I was there. Thinking this would be an easy thing to accomplish, I promised her that I would. However, when I checked around to see if any of the hair offered at the temple was available for sale, I could not find anything, anywhere. Finally, a beauty parlor owner in Tirupati explained to me that hair offered to the Lord is not available for sale in the local market. This was later verified by a senior TTD official who said that all hair offered by pilgrims is for export only. I must confess that I was a bit disappointed to hear this, as I had also made plans to buy some of this



COURTESY TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS

hair for my wife as a present from my pilgrimage.

A Testimony

Friday, June 3, 2005, will always be a special day in my life. That was the day I got my head shaved. Late at night—almost midnight, as a matter of fact—I had this ceremony performed in my room at the TTD Guest House in Tirumala. Arrangements had been made with the kind assistance of our guest house manager. The late hour was due to the fact that all the barbers were so busy. My head took seven minutes to shave. I timed it.

Though short and sweet, this experience had a tremendous effect on me. My whole personality completely transformed during that seemingly simple event. I felt differently afterward—as if I had attained some sort of enlightenment. After all, I had just offered my personal ego in the form of my hair at the feet of Lord Balaji.

I have had my head shaved only once before this. There were no pictures of that event, which took place in Rishikesh when I was only a year old. Had my parents not told me about this ceremony, I would not have known about it at all.

What I realized now that I certainly didn't realize then was how much one's personality is tied up in the hair, so to speak. One might rightly expect quite a significant psychological reaction from the experience of having the head shaved. Mine was not only positive, it was inspirational.

One of the nice things about participating in a ceremony like this in Tirumala is that—while you are there—you are among a lot of people who have just had the same experience. You can move around comfortably from place to place among literally thousands of others who look just like you. Interestingly enough, I felt more “normal” with a shaven head than without. Toward the end of my stay at Tirumala, I began planning for the task of explaining my appearance to friends and co-workers back home in Delhi.

It is worthy of note that in North India, a person often gets his or her head shaved when the mother or father expires. I certainly didn't want people assuming that had just happened in my life. So I did worry about this a bit. When I actually did get back to Delhi, however, I found that my concern was unwarranted. As soon as I mentioned the word, “Tirupati,” no further explanation for my appearance was necessary. Everyone tacitly understood.

Feeding Thousands

In the heart of Tirumala, right next door to the Venkateshwara Temple, as many as 60,000 pilgrims a day take their meals at a place known as the Annadanam Complex—

all for free. The TTD has been providing this service since 1985.

Today, every pilgrim who goes for *darshan* in the Venkateshwara Temple is handed a small slip of paper while leaving. This “ticket” entitles the person to one free meal at the complex.

When we visited this busy place to sample the cuisine, it was packed. Not only was the food tasty, it was surprisingly varied—especially for such a mass feeding. Each pilgrim was given a nutritious meal consisting of five items, including a sweet dish—and all were allowed to eat as much as they wanted.

As we entered the restaurant, we observed a large fleet of TTD employees and social workers moving gracefully like seasoned dancers as they quickly and efficiently served the hungry pilgrims. After one group of several hundred devotees finished eating, the whole place was cleaned, reset and



Helping hands: The loving care extended to the poor in Tirumala is world famous

served for the next group—all in a matter of just a few minutes. This dynamic squadron of servants work tirelessly in unbroken continuity from nine in the morning until midnight—every day.

This Annadanam Complex is run by the Annadanam Trust, which has fixed deposits in various banks worth US \$20 million. This trust also receives financial support from wealthy devotees who donate an average of about two million dollars a year. The interest from these savings is spent on the maintenance of the Annadanam Complex.

Training Priests

We had the good fortune of visiting the Sri Venkateshwara Veda Pathashala, a priest training school located only a few miles from Tirumala at a place called Dharmagiri

Hill. Our drive to the *gurukulam* (school) was breathtaking in its scenic beauty. A seven-foot-tall carving of Lord Brahma guards the entrance to this school, which is perched on 50 acres of glorious mountainous terrain covered with dense forests.

The *pathashala* is 221 years old. Within its precincts, thousands of priests and Sanskrit scholars have been trained through the years. Almost all of the Venkateshwara temple priests learned their craft here. Although the school was originally founded to train only priests for Tirumala, it eventually broadened its scope. Today, it boasts of alumni who perform in prestigious temples all around the world.

When the *pathashala* was established, it had three branches and only a handful of students. Now, there are more than 400 students studying in 14 branches. The full priest-training curriculum requires 12 years of study and is called the Vedadhyanam Course. Children begin this training at the age of eight. Three other shorter courses are offered at the *pathashala*. Each of these takes eight years to complete. Children receiving these courses begin their study at the age of 12. Although all of these systems prepare students for the performance of all the elaborate temple rituals, the Vedadhyanam Course provides more extensive training in chanting the *Vedas*. All of the teaching and living facilities at the *pathashala* are of the highest quality and free of charge. This includes meals, accommodation, clothes, books and medical services.

Although I have been fortunate enough to observe many impressive *gurukulams* throughout India, this *pathashala* is by far the finest I have ever seen. The classroom cottages are scattered about in picturesque locations throughout the vast land owned by the institution. The design of the buildings is ancient in concept, yet exhibits the highest standards of modern architecture. Drinking all of this in for the first time, I thought, “Here, the best of the East meets the best of the West.”

All of the teachers at the *pathashala* were more than cooperative in taking time out of their busy schedules to host us graciously. They even organized a performance in their central hall (see photo) so that we could hear the students collectively chanting Vedic mantras in a most beautiful manner. After the chanting, they invited Thomas and me to address the assembly.

Later, as we casually perused the facilities, we learned from the principal that great efforts were being made to obtain recognition from the University Grants Commission for the courses offered at the *pathashala*. The principal explained that this acknowledgment would further enhance the reputation of the institution, as well as place higher value on degrees obtained at the *pathashala*.



Picture of harmony: Teachers and students at the Sri Venkateshwara Veda Pathashala near Tirumala prepare to give a special performance

Such esteem, he said, could lead to better job placement opportunities for students after graduation and open up new opportunities for higher education if a student should choose to continue his studies.

Serving Pilgrims

All through our journey, Ravi had been of tremendous assistance to us. As Assistant Public Relations Officer at TTD, he had personally arranged many of our appointments and interviews with the institution's various departmental heads. He even stayed with us during meetings with some of the more important officials. He was our single most important liaison.

Besides shouldering most of the responsibilities of the institution's public interaction, Ravi also manages and guides thousands of volunteers who seek to perform service. Such service is referred to in Tirupati and Tirumala as Srivari Seva, meaning “service of the Lord.”

“Srivari Seva offers a unique opportunity to devotees to serve fellow pilgrims in many different ways,” explains Ravi. “According to scriptures, divine grace can be attained not only by worshiping the Deity in the temple but also by serving His devotees. Through Srivari Seva, devotees double the benefit they receive from worshiping by performing selfless acts for other people like themselves.”

According to Ravi, many of the devotees performing Srivari Seva are doctors, engineers, senior management executives and other highly qualified professionals. You would never know it to look at them. They all served so humbly, they melted into a divinity of oneness.

Whenever we visited Ravi, his office was

always literally overflowing with volunteers for Srivari Seva. These selfless servants were easy to spot. Not only were they always rushing forward to help, they also wore distinctive saffron-colored scarfs around their necks so they could be easily identified. Even the police ask them for help.

Thomas and I spoke with quite a few of these kindly souls. One particularly distinctive young lady made some insightful remarks about her service. “Performing Srivari Seva is a wonderful opportunity,” said Chennai resident Shri Priya, age 28. “Our main aim is to serve the devotees and pilgrims, although we also worship. No one checks up on our qualifications, because everyone qualifies to serve. I am an accountant by trade, but that means nothing here. I work side by side with some very sophisticated people. Some of them have great jobs and lots of money. Yet here we are all just human beings serving human beings. We get so immersed in *seva* that we sometimes forget to even take our own meals. We do not feel hungry when we are doing this work. Such is the greatness of this place.”

It is traditional in South India for Balaji devotees to send out elaborate and often artistically designed invitations to important family ceremonial events like weddings. As might be expected, the TTD receives thousands of these invitations. What might not be quite as obvious is that someone affiliated with the institution—usually a devotee performing Srivari Seva—responds to each and every single one of these cards. Not only that, this person also arranges for a special temple ceremony to be performed in the name of the family that extended the invitation, as well as for sacraments from the ceremony to be sent to that family.

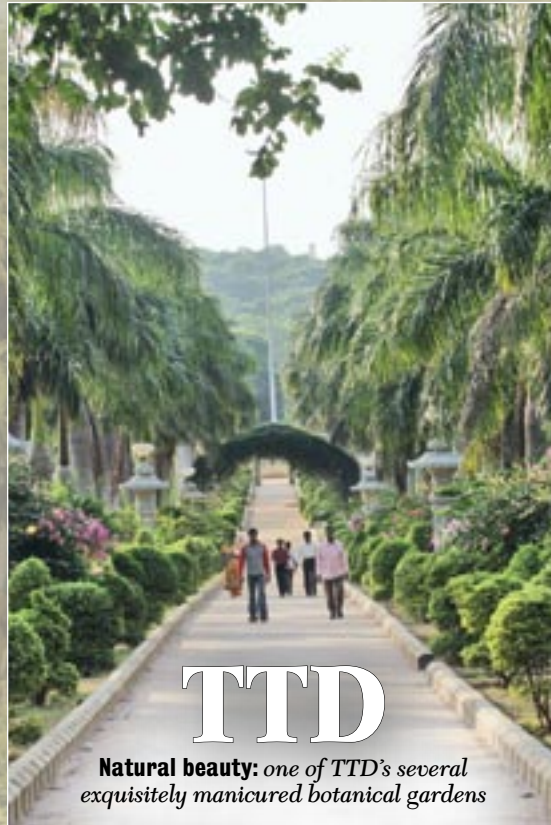
“Srivari Seva forms an integral part of worship at Tirumala,” explained Ravi. “It enlivens the spiritual life of the seekers and prepares them to act in accordance with the will of the Supreme Lord. Through Srivari Seva, TTD endeavors to perpetuate a noble tradition devotedly established by great saints who have passed before us. In the past five years, more than 68,000 volunteers have participated in Srivari Seva.”

Although it has been said of the TTD that it is overly commercial in requiring some devotees to pay for *darshan* and guest house accommodations, it is my feeling that no serious pilgrim could come away from worshiping in Tirumala bearing this sort of criticism. For one thing, the spiritual power of Lord Balaji is so undeniably powerful in this place that money matters of any sort seem petty by comparison.

Aside from that, even from a secular point of view, there is no question about the fact that the TTD looks out for the common man with extraordinary dedication. Food, medical treatment and head shaving are all provided free of charge to the poor and the downtrodden.

Anyone performing Srivari Seva in Tirumala will tell you that the greatest spiritual benefits are enjoyed by those who serve the weakest and poorest of Balaji's devotees. I believe this myself with all my heart and long for my own opportunity to serve the servants of the Lord of Seven Hills in that place where my life was changed forever.

For more general information about the TTD and the Balaji temple contact: <http://www.tirumala.org/>. To purchase an excellent book entitled Tirumala Tirupati the Legends and Beyond contact: www.vqibooks.com.



TTD

Natural beauty: one of TTD's several exquisitely manicured botanical gardens

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam

LIKE THE MANY FINGERS OF A FEW HELPING HANDS, THE broad range of services and facilities offered by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, TTD, is legendary throughout India and around the world. Referring affectionately to the Institute's yearly budget of two million dollars for social services, one quick-witted pilgrim redefined "TTD" to mean "Tradition, Technology and the Devotee." Certainly, the TTD utilizes a unique blend of technology and tradition in its service of devotees. While a thousand years of tradition are strictly honored in the temples' ceremonial practices, fifty percent of the institute's power is derived from windmills and solar paneling. With 16 million people visiting Tirumala every year, technological efficiency is an important consideration that figures into all aspects of the institution's service. To minimize pilgrim's waiting time at the temple, for instance,

computerized appointments for visits with Lord Balaji can be booked in advance at all major cities across India. The TTD also offers a variety of services in education and medical treatment, as well as the rehabilitation of the poor and handicapped. Two secular schools—one founded in 1876 in Vellore and the other in 1886 in Tirupati—are alive and well today, all because of the TTD. Ten square miles of forest are managed by the TTD via satellite. In the recent past, the institute planted 29,500 acres with 10 million saplings to protect the forests from fire. In addition to collecting rare Hindu scriptural manuscripts and teaching Indology, the Oriental Research Institute—established by the TTD in 1939—promotes Indology through the publication of relevant anthologies, chrestomathies, translations, monographs, indexes, dictionaries, encyclopedias and more.



Services provided by the TTD:

(Clockwise from upper left) A thirty-foot-tall statue of Bajrangabali, God of the Monkeys, lords over the entrance to an ornamental garden. The luxurious Srinivasam Pilgrim Amenities Complex provides exquisite accommodations to the poor, free of charge. Two craftsmen chip away at a statue of Balaji at the Sri Venkateshwara Institute of Sculpture and Architecture. Ancient sacred scriptures are preserved at the Oriental Research Institute. (Background) From within a temple garden behind a TTD guest house in Tirupati, the plateaus looming over Tirumala, about 15 miles away, can clearly be seen.



Let the day begin: Following a hearty breakfast, students at the Venkateshwara Veda Pathashala head for their first morning class

Preparing Tomorrow's Priesthood

The headmaster of one of India's finest priest training schools talks about living, learning and teaching in the way of the ancient Vedic forefathers

G.K. Ramamurthy, 46, began his priestly studies in 1967 at the famous Sri Venkateshwara Veda Pathashala in Dharmagiri near Tirumala. After graduating in 1982, he stayed on as a teacher. Since 1992 he has been head principal of the illustrious institution, which is considered one of the finest priest-training centers in India. HINDUISM TODAY correspondent Rajiv Malik had the opportunity to speak with the distinguished acharya (teacher) when he visited the school grounds. Here are some excerpts.

How many students are being taught here and what do they study? We now have 26 teachers instructing 400 students in 14 subjects. Two thousand priests have graduated from this institution. We teach the entire gamut of temple rituals. The students here live on the premises. This institution is more like an ashram.

There are various Agamas in our ancient literature, but we teach only three in



The guru: Acharya G.K. Ramamurthy

this pathashala. These are the Vaikhansa Agama, the Pancharatra Agama and the Saiva Agama. The Pancharatra Agama is used for worshipping Goddess Padmavati. The Vaikhansa Agama is known as the agama of Lord Venkateshwara. Lord Bala Ji is worshipped only through the Vaikhanasa Agama. In Vaikhansa Agama training, we now have 175 students. The Saiva Agamas are meant for Siva temples only. Each student is free to choose the agama he wants to learn, but he is restricted to the study of that agama only throughout his training here.

Does the school curriculum include education on subjects other than those directly related to priest training? We don't teach philosophy, although the students learn all about worship and its practice. This cultivation of personal devotion is fundamental to all of the other training. The students are also taught astrology, Sanskrit and the Dharma-shastra (a famous ancient Hindu scrip-

ture delineating civil code, social law and moral principle). Students are offered a choice of two courses. The twelve-year course is quite extensive. It covers priest training as well as a deeper study of the Vedas. The eight-year course is specifically designed to prepare students to become fully trained temple priests.

Has the ancient pathashala system changed in any way to adapt to modern times? Many years ago, we only taught priests for the Balaji Temple. When it was decided to expand the priest-training program, this pathashala began to grow rapidly. Also, a few years back English was introduced here as a part of the curriculum. We are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of English as a second language. Specifically, we are teaching the students to read, write and speak in English.

Do graduates of the school generally prefer to work at the Balaji Temple in Tirumala as a first option, or do they sometimes choose to work elsewhere? There is no compulsion for a priest to join this particular temple after completing his study. A graduate is free to work at any temple he chooses. The average salary of a priest at the Balaji Temple is US \$300 per month, which is considered very good here in this country.

In India there are many temples. Priests who aren't recruited here can easily get jobs elsewhere. The demand for priests is greater than the supply. Today, priests who have been trained in this pathashala are happily settled all around the world.

There are three working shifts of priests per day in the Balaji temple. Each shift requires 20 to 30 priests. So every day, between 60 and 90 qualified priests are required just to keep the temple functioning at a basic level. During festivals, many more are needed. So, the need here at home is great.

Are there any special qualifications that must be met by young men who aspire to be priests in Tirumala? A priest at the Balaji temple in Tirumala must be born the son of a Vaikhansa Archakar, a priest who is himself fully trained in the Vaikhansa Agama. He must also be taught certain priestly sam-skaras (subconscious impressions) while still in the mother's womb. This is accomplished through a ritual called the Vishnu Bali. Vai-

khansa Archakars are also sometimes referred to as Adi Vaishnavas.

What are the plans for the future of the school? At present, we have 24 classrooms in the pathashala. We plan to construct 45 more. All of the classrooms are modern, as are the living facilities. We also plan to construct a huge library and an ultra-modern kitchen. Work on all of these projects will be starting in the very near future.

Are there any dangers or hazards associated with living in the forest like this? The Vedic pathashala is also located on holy ground. This is what keeps us safe, even though we are in the midst of a dense forest. It is most interesting to note that never in the history of the pathashala have any of our students gotten injured or even suffered from a snake bite, even though in the forest area like this, there are many poisonous snakes. Such is the grace of Lord Balaji here in this sacred place. There have even been some instances where our students suffered from snake bites in their own native villages where the probability of receiving such injuries was much less. One of our students died from such a snake bite at his home after studying here for a number of years with no such problem of this sort at all.

Is the school enrollment expanding? About 30 to 35 students graduate every year. However, the ratio of new students to graduating students is more than four to one. We are expecting to admit 120 new students in the next few months. This will bring our student count up to 500. By the year 2010 we hope to have 1,000 students. Naturally, with this kind of expansion, our budget will go up. Now we receive about \$500,000 every year. This should easily quadruple.



A forest paradise: Between classes, students enjoy relaxing, chatting and practicing Sanskrit in exquisite natural surroundings, tastefully accented only with modern conveniences



Picture perfect: A classic Vedic scene like this—priestly students gathering closely around their teachers at the Veda Pathashala—is not commonly seen elsewhere in India today



Summit speakers: (right to left), B.K. Agnihotri, Rajiv Malhotra, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Chidananda Saraswati, Sri Sudarshan, Dr. Pranav Pandya, Swami Nikhilananda, Arumugaswami, Palaniswami and Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

CONFERENCES

Summit Ponders Next Generation

Hindu Collective Initiative formed by 400 Hindus gathers in New Jersey

AFTER INITIALLY WONDERING IF ANY one would attend, Dr. Ved Chaudhary finally had to close enrollment in the Dharma Summit 2005 on August 13 when it reached capacity at 400 (including representatives from 80 Hindu institutions). Scores were turned away. Under the inspired and personal direction of one of today's most dynamic spiritual leaders, Sri Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Dr. Chaudhary organized the Summit to "bring together heads of all *devalayas*, spiritual institutions and dharmic intellectuals in North America to exchange thoughts and ideas, and share experiences on how to impart spiritual and cultural education to our next generation and remove misconceptions about our faith traditions from the society in order to maintain our traditions with dignity." The conference included Hindus, Jains and Sikhs.

Chaudhary told HINDUISM TODAY, "I consider the most important outcome of the conference to be the spirit of unity that the

conference fostered among the attendees, the awareness and acceptance of contemporary issues facing the community and an overwhelming desire to undertake a collective initiative to shape the future of Hindu traditions in North America."

The days were long throughout the sessions, running from the 7:30 am gathering to 9:30 or 10:00 pm, with vegetarian breakfast, lunch and dinner provided free by BAPS volunteers and served at the conference venue at the Student Center at Rutgers University. Rutgers is one of the oldest colleges in America, founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1766. It is a red brick college near a river, in a 350-year-old town.

Major spiritual leaders graced the conference, including Swami Dayananda Saraswati; Swami Chidananda Saraswati (Muniji) of Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh, India; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, publisher of HINDUISM TODAY magazine and HPI; Gurudev Chitrabhanu of Jain Ashram, New

York; Dr. Pranav Pandya of Gayatri Pariwar, Haridwar, India; Swami Jyotirmayananda of Vivekananda Center, Mangalore; Swamini Janeshwari Devi of Barsana Dham and others. An unexpected guest speaker was Sri Sudharsan, head of the RSS. Many intellectuals also spoke, including Dr. Ved Nanda, Prof. Bhudev Sharma, Dr. David Frawley, Dr. Piyush Agrawal, Sri Kanchan Banerji and Dr. Rakesh Shreedhar.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati proposed the formation of a Hindu Collective Initiative. Swamiji outlined a basic organizational structure for continued cooperation. The Initiative would allow all Hindu religious organizations to work together to shape the future of Hinduism in North America. It would address issues such as promoting changes to enhance the participation of the new generation and correcting biased views of Hindu traditions.

Of paramount concern was the transmission of Hinduism to second- and third-gen-

eration Hindus now growing up (or grown up) in the US. Generally speaking, few organizations present said they have adequate programs for teaching the youth, though some, such as the Swadhyaya Pariwar founded by Sri Athavale, have fully developed programs of weekly classes and summer youth programs. Several temple directors and managers (and there were dozens there) talked about the need for effective programs.

Bodhinatha Veylanswami emphasized in his talk the need for the temples to educate the parents in Hinduism right along with the youth. He also stressed the importance of parents' setting the example in religiousness, beginning with maintaining a home shrine where the family worships daily. Passing on the faith has its strongest promise in the home, supplemented by educational programs like temple classes, summer camps and cultural training.

A second prominent issue at the conference was the poor treatment Hinduism receives in the dozens of textbooks used in American schools and colleges. Speakers explained how to approach local school boards at the time books are up for adoption, how to influence the selection and even future editions of books. Rajiv Malhotra explained the ways American and European academics have distorted the understanding of Hinduism, and he offered ways that Hindus can correct the situation.

Speakers associated with temples touched on the need to integrate with the majority community, to become more actively engaged in their neighborhoods and communities. They lamented that a number of Hindu communities live a rather insular life in America, unaware of the religions of their neighbors and not trying to join into the

mainstream or be part of their town or county. Speakers encouraged temples to reach out more, to study the philosophy, history and practices of the faiths they are surrounded by, get to know the leaders of other religious communities, develop strong connections with the press, participate in local charities, free clinics, free feedings and the like.

There was a youth presence from the Hindu Students Council and the Hindu American Foundation. It can also be said, however, that the youth presence was not as strong as it should have been, nor was the participation of women.

On August 15, India's Independence Day (and Swami Dayananda's birthday), attention turned to a constellation of temple issues in a workshop organized by the Hindu University of America. A vital topic was priest training and duties. Concern was expressed over the duties of priests with regard to the temple ceremonies, and the duties with regard to home ceremonies, especially funerals. In India these are traditionally handled by two different groups of priests. One group performs the temple ceremonies, and the other performs home ceremonies. In the West, due to a shortage priests, many temples have priests from either tradition performing both tasks, one of which they are often not trained for.

Another area of focus was the need for teachers of Hinduism and counselors to deal with devotees' personal problems of. Priests are trained to perform neither of these functions, though some priests have done both successfully. Participants debated whether community members should be trained to fulfill the role of spiritual counselor, or if the priests should be so trained, with the general opinion favoring the former.

Kathy Nanda of Denver spoke on the legal aspects of temple management, including financial and fiduciary responsibility, liability, libel and defamation. She urged temple board members to clearly understand their legal duties and responsibilities.

To assure a future based on the founding principles, stress was given to making sure the constitution of every temple is strong, for that is the primary guide for future management boards. Constitutions are difficult to change, it was noted, while bylaws can be easily altered by a simple majority vote.

The Bridgewater Temple of New Jersey, just a 15-minute drive from the venue, outlined an innovative program called the Traveling Mandir. The motivation is to keep college-age students involved in Hinduism. Their parents organize a temporary temple at the local college, Rutgers in this case, on Sunday morning during the time other students are attending Christian services. The program includes a puja, prayers-meditation and scriptural study. The youth reportedly appreciate this effort to give them access to religious observances.

Devotees should be encouraged to include a donation to the temple in their wills, "even if it's just two percent." The Salvation Army, America's richest nonprofit by far, receives a large part of its donations each year in the form of bequests from wills, the result of long efforts to encourage people to include the Army in their will.

Overall, it was a successful three days, as Hindus from many parts of the country came together to share their thoughts on issues of mutual concern. For those who would like to know about and participate in future plans, please contact Dr. Ved Chaudhary at ved.chaudhary@gmail.com.

Speakers: (left to right) Swami Dayananda Saraswati called for a Hindu Collective Initiative; Dr. Ved Chaudhary, conference organizer; Professor Ved Nanda of the University of Denver exhorts the audience to instill in their children pride for their Hindu heritage



Namaste, Aunti-ji, It's Hinglish

Changa, yaar and other Hindi terms enter English dictionaries in the UK

BY AMBIKA BEHAL, WASHINGTON, D.C.

THROUGH THE CENTURIES, HINDUS have periodically donated a part of their genius to the Western world. Mathematics, medicine, astronomy and, more recently, yoga, meditation, ayurvedic medicine and spicy food have all found a place in daily Western culture. So when you hear someone yelling "Badmash!" (meaning naughty, also, hooligan) on the street in London, don't automatically assume it is just an Indian vocalizing his Hindi speaking skills. In fact, with no Indian in sight, you might hear words such as *kunjoos* (miser), *bandar* (monkey, mischievous minor boy) or *gora* (white male) being added to perfectly English conversations.

Collins recently released its seventh edition English dictionary, complete with an array of definitions for "Hinglish" words. The word *Hinglish* is itself used in two senses. In England, it means the Hindi words coming into English, while in India, it is the hybrid language created when Hindi speakers intersperse English words with Hindi, such as, "*Pitaji*, time *kya hua hai?*" ("Father, what is the time right now?"). The loanwords entering English are often those used when the Hinglish is almost all English, except for a choice term or expression in Hindi, such as, "I have *hazaar* things on my mind right now." ("I have thousands of things on my mind right now.")

The general public in the UK has been introduced to Hinglish by mainstream television shows such as "The Kumars at Number 42," "Silver Street" and, most famously, the comedy "Goodness Gracious Me" which coined the popular (and vulgar) phrase, "Kiss my chuddies."

Jeremy Butterfield, Editor-in-Chief of Collins Dictionaries, explained to HINDUISM TODAY the reason for including so many loanwords in the new edition. "We thought that the increasing importance of India on the world stage and as a growth economy was being reflected in the spread of Indian words round the world." Not all the words are Hindi words. There is a slight Punjabi flair owing to the boisterous Punjabi popu-

lation inhabiting Britain, so it is no surprise when words such as *changa* (good) and *chuddie* also appear.

The project to incorporate South Asian dialect in the Collins Dictionary was assisted by teacher B. K. Mahal, author of *The*

origin, drawn from 120 different languages.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* first adopted Hindi words when they made their way into general use as British colonialists returned from India with new vocabulary during the 18th and 19th centuries. *Shampoo*, *bungalow*, *jungle*, *mantra*, *pundit* and *catamaran* are some of the words that entered the language in those days.

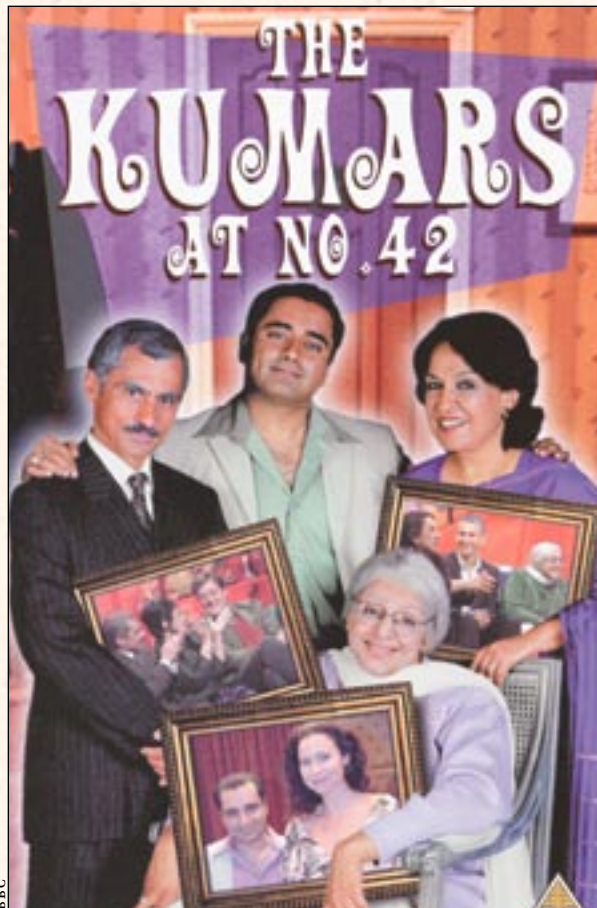
Juliet Field, Senior Editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, who noted that *badmash* is already in the dictionary, explained the dictionary's guidelines. "Words from these languages [of India], and, indeed, from any other foreign language, are included in our dictionaries when we have collected enough evidence that they are understood, used and established in English."

Several Hinglish words are common insults. Mahal explained, "It is a universal truth that the first words any adolescent learns from a new language are often of a profane or derogatory nature. Much of this is attributed to the way in which adolescents teach each other new words." Hinglish integration into English appears to be following in the footsteps of Irish, French and German—entering first as insult words and slowly working their way in.

Among the Hinglish words that feature in the *Collins Dictionary* are *kutta* and *kutti* (dog and she-dog—both of which can be insults), *haramzaada* and *haramzaadi* (obnoxious male or female), *yaar* (friend), *changa* (an expression of approval or agreement, from Punjabi), *namaste* (greetings—the only one of these terms used in America so far), *motu*

(fat person), *rasmalai* (sweet, also, an attractive woman). Another set are English words adapted to Hindi and returned. These include *aunti-ji*, *uncle-ji*, *freshie* (a recent immigrant) and *filmii* (Bollywood style drama).

So, when popular English television chef Jamie Oliver yells, "Pukka!" (literally, "cooked," but meaning "okay" "finished" "complete") at the final taste of his cooking, the Hindi-speaking population can cheer, because English has once again adopted a useful term.



Language education: The popular comedy is providing the British with a good laugh and a few choice new words

Pocket Guide to Being an Indian Girl. Mahal said that this evolution in language is assisted by the fact that "English is a mongrel language" being tugged at by the multiculturalization of Britain. "Six-year-olds in my class aren't using Hinglish words because it gives them credibility," she said, "They use it to express their world. If your world is a concoction of languages, then no doubt in everyday conversation these languages will dance and have accidents with one another." The majority of English words are of foreign

Family Life & Monastic Life



The Spiritual Ideals of
Hinduism's Two Noble Paths



THOMAS KELLY



EHUD SPERLING

Exemplars of dharma's two paths: *Respected leader of Juna Akhara, Acharya Avdheshananda Ji; (right) writer and homemaker Vatsala Sperling of Vermont, USA, with her son Mahar*



In Hinduism there has always been a choice of paths to follow—*grihastha* or *sannyasa*, family or monk. Unfortunately, in modern Hinduism the distinction between the two has become muddled, both in the minds of Hindus themselves as well as in textbooks and other writings that present Hinduism to the non-Hindu world. ¶Hinduism's *purusharthas*, four goals of life, are a useful reference for understanding the distinction between the two paths. The four goals are 1) *dharma*, or piety; 2) *artha*, or wealth; 3) *kama*, or pleasure; and 4) *moksha*, or liberation. Those on the *grihastha* path pursue all four goals, and the way they do so changes according to their age or *ashrama* in life. Those on the *sannyasa* path renounce *artha*, *kama* and family *dharma* in one-pointed pursuit of *moksha*—liberation from rebirth on Earth through intense personal experience of God. ¶For the *grihastha*, in the first *ashrama*, *brahmacharya*, age 12-24, the primary focus is on studying at school and preparing for profession and married life. In the second *ashrama*, *grihastha*, age 24-48, the primary focus is raising a family and fulfilling a career. The third *ashrama*, *vanaprastha*, age 48-72, is a time of transition from family and career to one of elder advisor to the younger generation. The fourth *ashrama*, *sannyasa*, age 72 onward, is a time in which the primary focus is on *moksha*, meaning that religious practices are the main activity of one's day. The *sannyasin* directly enters the fourth *ashrama* at the time of his initiation, no matter what his age, skipping over the other phases of life. ¶One of the most common ways the two paths have been muddled in modern Hinduism is in the classic textbook notion that Hindus believe the world is unreal and that this is why there is so much poverty in India. This, of course, is an incorrect perception. The accurate statement is that those on the path of the monk are trained to look at the world as impermanent, or unreal or fleeting. *Grihasthas*, however are not. They pursue the same ideals of success, family and wealth as do families in Western society. ¶Many thoughtful Hindu lay leaders lament the lack of trained Hindus who can speak out in a knowledgeable way about Hinduism. One trend is to train Hindu priests for this capacity, which in the Western world is called a minister. Said another way, Hinduism needs more ministers to teach and counsel. Of course, this is one of the roles that Hindu monks traditionally fulfill. Thus, another solution is to produce and train more swamis and sadhus to serve as competent ministers. ¶This 16-page Educational Insight is drawn primarily from Gurudeva's Master Course trilogy (www.gurudeva.org/resources/books/).

Bodhinatha Veylanawami

Two Ways of Dharma

From the Sacred Teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami



S. RAJAM

A scene from olden days in India, a priest and his wife sit before a *sannyasin* to receive his

blessings. They present to him a difficulty they face and he gives advice from tradition.



here are two traditional paths for the devout Hindu of nearly every lineage. The first is the path of the renunciate. The second is the path of the householder, who guides human society and produces the next generation. The ancient *rishis* evolved well-defined principles for both, knowing that unmarried aspirants would most easily unfold by adhering to principles of nonownership, noninvolvement in the world and *brahmacharya* (celibacy), while married men and women would uphold the more complex and material family *dharma*. Though the principles or guidelines for these two paths are different, the goal is the same: to establish a life dedicated to spiritual unfoldment, hastening the evolution of the soul through knowledge of the forces at work within us, and wise, consistent application of that knowledge.



THE PATH OF RENUNCIATION

The two fundamental objectives of *sannyasa*, renunciation, are to promote the spiritual progress of the individual, bringing him into God Realization, and to protect and perpetuate the religion. *Sannyasa* life has both an individual and a universal objective. At the individual level, it is a life of selflessness in which the *sannyasin* has made the supreme sacrifice of renouncing all personal ambition, all involvement in worldly matters, that he might direct his consciousness and energies fully toward God. Guided by the *satguru* along the *sadhana marga*, he unfolds through the years into deeper and deeper realizations. Ultimately, if he persists, he comes into direct knowing of transcendent Reality. At the universal level, the *sannyasins* foster the entire religion by preserving the truths of the Sanatana Dharma. Competent swamis are the teachers, the theologians, the exemplars of their faith, the torchbearers lighting the way for all.

Among those on the renunciate path, there are two lifestyles. In our *Holy Orders of Sannyasa*, these two lifestyles are described as follows. "Some among them are *sadhus*, anchorites living in the seclusion of distant caves and remote forests or wandering as homeless mendicants, itinerant pilgrims to the holy sanctuaries of Hinduism. Others dwell as *cenobites*, assembled with their brothers, often in the *ashrama*, *aadheenam* or *matha* of their *satguru*, but always under the *guru*'s aegis, serving together in fulfillment of a common mission. These devotees, when initiated into the order of *sannyasa*, don the saffron robes and thereby bind themselves to a universal body of Hindu renunciates,

Voices on Hindu Family Life

Leaders of the United Nations dedicated 1994 as the international Year of the Family. They were seeking to counter a global failure of the family unit and the by-products of such a breakdown: crime, delinquent youth, disobedient children, divorce and other household miseries, in other words the basic problems of social instability. They decided to inquire of the major religions of the world as to what their views were and are today on family life, all planned for a multi-lingual United Nations publication, *Family Issues as Seen by Different Religions*, a unique vision of family from the point of view of Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Baha'is. The UN approached us at HINDUISM TODAY magazine to define and describe the traditional family values of the Hindu. In creating the Hindu chapter to the UN book, we joined forces with two of our HINDUISM TODAY correspondents, Archana Dongre of Los Angeles and Lavina Melwani of New York. Their comments provide the "voices" of experience throughout the text. We include excerpts from the resulting article here as a sidebar to this Educational Insight on the two paths of Hindu *dharma*.

numbering today three million, whose existence has never ceased, an assembly of men inwardly linked in their mutual dedication to God, though not necessarily outwardly associated."

There are three primary currents in the human nerve system. The aggressive-intellectual current is masculine, mental in nature and psychically seen as blue in color. This current is termed in Sanskrit *pingala*. The passive-physical current is feminine, material in nature. This current, which is pink or red, is known as *ida*. The third current is spiritual in nature and flows directly through the spine and into the head. Being yellowish-white, the *sushumna*, as it is called, is the channel for pure spiritual energies that flood into the body through the spine and out into the 6,000 miles of nerve currents. Depending on the nature and dharma, each individual's energy expresses itself as predominantly physical or intellectual—passive or aggressive—or spiritual. However, in the sannyasin the two forces are so precisely balanced that neither is dominant, and he therefore lives almost totally in *sushumna*. The monastic, whether a monk or a nun, is in a sense neither male nor female, but a being capable of all

modes of expression.

Brahmacharya for the monastic means complete sexual abstinence and is, of course, an understood requirement to maintain this position in life. Transmutation of the sexual energies is an essential discipline for the monastic. Transmutation is not a repression or inhibition of natural instincts, but a conscious transformation of these energies into life-giving forces that lend vigor and strength to the body and provide the impetus that propels awareness to the depths of contemplation. This process of transmutation begins with the sexual instincts but encompasses transmutation of all instinctive forces, including fear, anger, covetousness, jealousy, envy, pride, etc. True purity is possible only when these base instincts have been conquered.

The renunciate fosters the inner attitude, strictly maintained, that all young women are his sisters and all older women his mother. He does not view movies that depict the base instincts of man, nor look at books, magazines or websites of this nature. The principle with which he is working is to protect the mind's natural purity, not allowing anything that is degrading, sensu-

ous or low-minded to enter into the field of his experience.

At times, the renunciate's *sadhana* is austere, as he burns layer after layer of dross through severe *tapas*. He wears the saffron robe, studies the ancient ways and scriptures. He chants the sacred mantras. He reflects constantly on the Absolute. He lives from moment to moment, day to day. He is always available, present, open. He has neither likes nor dislikes, but clear perceptions.

Having stepped out of his ego shell, the sannyasin is a free soul. Nothing binds him. Nothing claims him. Nothing involves him. Without exclusive territory, without limiting relationships, he is free to be himself totally. If he has problems within himself, he keeps them silently within and works them out there. If he speaks, it is only to say what is true, kind, helpful or necessary. He never argues, debates, complains. His words and his life always affirm, never negate. He finds points of agreement, forsaking contention and difference. No man is his enemy. No man is his friend. All men are his teachers. Some teach him what to do; others teach him what not to do. He has no one to rely upon except God, Gods, guru and the power within his own spine. He is strong, yet gentle. He is aloof,

yet present. He is enlightened, yet ordinary. He speaks wisely of the Vedic scriptures and ancient shastras and lives them in his own example. Yet, he consciously remains inconspicuous, transparent.

He is a man on the path of enlightenment who has arrived at a certain subsuperconscious [intuitive] state and wishes to stay there. Therefore, he automatically has released various interactions with the world, physically and emotionally, and remains poised in a contemplative, monastic lifestyle. The basic thought behind the philosophy of being a sannyasin is to put oneself in a hot-house condition of self-imposed discipline, where unfoldment of the spirit can be catalyzed at a greater intensity than in family life, where the exterior concerns and overt responsibilities of the world predominate.

The sannyasin is the homeless one who remains detached from all forms of involvement—friends, family, personal ambition—finding security in his own being rather than attaching himself to outward manifestations of security, warmth and companionship. He is alone, but never lonely. He lives as though on the eve of his departure, often abiding no more than three nights in the same place. He may be a pilgrim, a wandering sadhu. He may be a

OUR CENTER GALLERY ALTERNATELY FEATURES SCENES OF HOUSEHOLDERS AND

RENUNCIATES ENGAGED IN WORSHIP, SERVICE, FELLOWSHIP AND LIFE'S MANY JOYS



ROHINI KUMAR



SESHU BADRINATH/PIPAL PRODUCTIONS



BABY PHOTOS OF JAFFNA



THOMAS KELLY



RAJAS SIVANATHAN



YALE UNIV. PRESS/STEPHEN P. HUYLER

When family life possesses love and virtue, it has found both its essence and fruition. Tirukural, verse 5

Scenes from Family Life

A mother applies a forehead mark for her daughter during puja; a beautifully adorned woman outshines the roses in a Singapore garden; a youth carries kavadi during festival time at Nallur Temple in Sri Lanka; children in Nepal offer lamps during the Chaith festival; a Jaffna-born couple marry in London; a royal priest pours sandalwood paste over a crystal Sivalinga during puja

THE HINDU VIEW OF FAMILY

Hindu families all over the world are struggling—some failing, most succeeding. Our experience is that those most rooted in their Hinduness cope better and are the better survivors. Hindu households, sheltering one-sixth of the human race, are being threatened. What if the concept of family itself were dying? What if the very institution, the cauldron of our cultural and spiritual consciousness, were struck by some fatal disease and perished? Who could measure such a tragedy? Who could weep sufficient tears? Yet, that is precisely the path which we are semi-consciously following, a path leading to the demise of the traditional Hindu family, the source of our strength, the patron of our spirituality, the sole guarantor of our future.

Is it our fault that the family is disintegrating? Perhaps. Does it portend uncertainty? Be certain that it does. Is it inevitable? Probably not. A final eulogy for the Hindu family may be premature. With that in mind, let us embark on an exploration of some of the Hindu family's truly remarkable strengths.

VOICES: *My grandma never tired of reminding us that the Hindu religion always glorified sacrifice. It was considered heroic to make sacrifice for the family members. Hindu epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata purport that even great beings like Lord Rama and noble kings like the Pandavas had to endure trying circumstances and make sacrifices. "So what's wrong if ordinary folks had to make some sacrifices?" she would say. Parents often make great sacrifices to give a good education to their children. Many Hindu parents have gone hungry to afford quality education for their children. The children in turn curtail their freedom and luxury when parents grow old and infirm and need support from the younger generation. A Hindu never pities a sacrifice, but glorifies it with appreciation. Grandma made a big point to us about hospitality. She took it as a spiritual duty to serve guests as if they were God. This helped a lot in tying her community together and gave the family a loving way to greet the outside world. If a guest comes to a family, even unannounced, he is invited in warmly and asked about his well being. He is also served*

the best food in the house, even to the extent that family members may go hungry to ensure that the guest is well fed. Hinduism taught us the love of all living creatures. At lunch time, my mother would say a silent prayer and set aside a portion to be fed to the cows. If a hungry man came to the door at mealtime, he was fed and given a few coins.

VOICES: *Growing up a Hindu in India, I found that pleasure and pilgrimage, religious rituals and daily life were intricately intertwined. Religion was always associated with joy and pleasure, never moralistic teaching. Every weekend we were taken to the beautiful sandstone Birla Mandir—cold marble below bare feet, the softness of the marigolds and rose petals in our hands, the smiling faces of Krishna, Siva and Vishnu, the harmonium and cymbals and the sheer faith of hundreds*

of devotees. Afterwards, there were joy rides in the temple complex, trinkets and holy pictures and a cold soda. For us, it was a spiritual Disney World.



A. MANIVEL

A family study teachings of their lineage

VOICES: *Where I grew up, mothers ruled the house, even though they did not go out in the olden days to earn. Sisters were respected and given gifts on at least two religious occasions. The rituals like Raksha Bandhan and Bhau Bij are woven around pure love between a brother and a sister and bonding of that relationship. In the former, the sister ties a specially made bracelet around her brother's wrist, requesting him to protect her if need be, and in the latter, the sister does arati (a worshipful expression of love and devotion through a tiny lighted ghee lamp) to her brother, wishing him long life and prosperity. The brother gives her gifts and*

monastic contemplative living in a cloistered monastery or semi-cloistered ashrama.

In preparation for sannyasa, the aspirant leaves behind family, former friends and old acquaintances and steps out into a new pattern of subsuperconscious living. He strives to be all spine-power, all light. When we see him trying, although he may not be too successful at it if he is going through some inner turmoil or challenge, we know he is striving, and that is an inspiration to us. His very existence is his mission in life. He has dedicated himself to live a life of total commitment to the path of yoga, and by doing so he sustains the spiritual vibration for the householders. It is the renunciate who keeps the Vedic religions alive on the Earth. He keeps the philosophy vibrant and lucid, presenting it dynamically to the householders.

Monks of every Hindu order are guided and guarded by unseen beings who look after their lives as if they were their own. Families are blessed who share in and support the renunciation of their sons born through them to perform a greater dharma than the *grihastha* life could ever offer. It is the monastic communities worldwide, of all religions, that sustain sanity on this

planet. It is the monks living up to their vows who sustain the vibration of law and order in the communities and nations of the world. This is how the *devonic* [angelic] world sees each monastic community worldwide. This is how it is and should always be. This is how humanity balances out its experiential karmas and avoids destroying itself as it passes through the darkness of the Kali Yuga. The monastic communities that surround the planet, fulfilling their dharma, compensate for the *adharma* that is so prevalent, thus ensuring that humanity does not self-destruct in these trying times. We must, for the sake of clarity, state here that monastic communities are either strictly male or strictly female. Coed mixed-group ashramas are not monastic communities, but classed traditionally as communes.

Path-Choosing

The two paths—householder and renunciate—every young man has to choose between them. In Hindu tradition the choice is made before the marriage ceremony, and, if not, during the ceremony itself. Though guided by the advice of parents, elder family members and religious leaders, the choice is his and his alone as

to how his soul is to live through the birth karmas of this incarnation. Both paths take courage, great courage, to step forward and embrace the responsibilities of adult life.

In making this decision in our tradition we have found it valuable for the young man to spend time in a Hindu monastery where he can live the monk's life for a period of six months or more and receive spiritual and religious training that will enhance his character for a positive future, no matter which path he chooses. Only by living for a time as a monk will he come to truly understand the monastic path and be empowered to make a knowledgeable choice between that path and the traditional dharma of the householder, raising a family and serving the community. One of the best times for this sojourn apart from the world, setting aside life's usual concerns, is just after high school or during an interim break. Then, after the time in the monastery, a firm and positive consideration should be made, in consultation with family and elders, as to which of the two paths he wishes to pursue.

Path-choosing is a beginning, pointing a direction, declaring an intention. Marriage becomes a lifetime commitment only when the final marriage vows are spoken. This is preceded by months

or even years of choosing a spouse, a process that calls forth the wisdom of the two families, community elders, religious leaders and those who are trained to judge astrological compatibilities. Renunciate life in our Natha tradition and many others becomes a lifetime commitment only when final, lifetime vows of renunciation of the world are voiced. In some lineages, no formal vows are even taken, but there are traditionally understood norms of conduct, proprieties and protocol to be adhered to.

We might say that one does not choose renunciation, but rather is chosen by it, when the soul is matured to the point when the world no longer holds a binding fascination. While considerations of the order that one will join are practical realities, it is vital that the young man choosing renunciate life does so not seeking place or position in a particular order, but sets out as a free spirit, unencumbered, under the guidance of his *satguru*, willing to serve everywhere and anywhere he is sent, be it in his guru's central ashrama, a distant center, a monastery of another guru or alone on an independent *sadhana*. The clear path is to define the path itself. Then, proceed with confidence.

Know it with a certainty beyond question that the path of renun-



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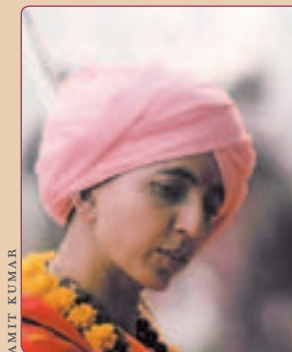
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AMIT KUMAR

Attempting to speak of the renunciate's magnitude is like numbering all the human multitudes who have ever died. Tirukural verse 22

Scenes from Renunciate Life

An ash-covered sadhu in prayer; Pramukh Swami, head of BAPS, initiating a new sadhu in Bhuj; Swami Tejomayananda with devotees; sadhus sit for a simple meal served on banana leaves; a score of men during initiatory rites in Ujjain to enter the Avahan Akhara; two Vaishnava yogis perform fire tapas, encircled by burning coals; a holy woman of Juna Akhara at the Ujjain Kumbha Mela

sweets on both occasions. The Hindu religious principles emphasize that women should be respected. A Sanskrit saying goes, "Yatra naryastu pujiyante, ramante tatra devatah." It means that wherever the women are honored, those are the places where even the Gods rejoice.

How is the Hindu concept of family experienced differently from that of other faiths? Only in the faiths of India does one encounter the tenet that we all experience a multitude of families in our journey toward God. In birth after birth we evolve, our tradition assures. In family after family we grow and mature and learn. Thus, in the Hindu family we find that the past and the future are intricately bound together. How intricately? We know a Sri Lankan family who is certain that their daughter, now nine, is the father's deceased grand-



A. MANIVEL

At death, a soul leaving her body received by angelic beings

mother. In this community it is considered a very great blessing—especially if one has the privilege of being part of a fine, noble family—for a departed relative to be born again into its midst. There is a profound intuition that when relatives pass they will return, perhaps soon and perhaps in the very same home. So, everyone watches for the telltale signs. How wonderful, the family feels, to care for grandma as she once cared for us!

Thus, the spiritual insight into rebirth extends the family concept beyond the present, binding the present to the past, and promising further continuity with the future. Many Hindu families are aware of such relationships. Many others will consciously seek to be born into a particular family, knowing that life there will be fulfilling, secure and high-minded.

VOICES: When a married daughter visits her parents' family, she is revered like a guest but showered with love like a daughter, with blessings and all the nice clothes as well as food the family can give. I had such a wonderful homecoming in India after I had lived for many years in the West. Such a homecoming of a few days is an emotionally gratifying, soul-satisfying event for the girl, who carries those fond memories for life.

Hinduism teaches a constellation of principles which, if followed by husband and wife, make the bold assertion that preserving the marriage and the integrity of the family holds rewards that far outweigh benefits they might expect from separation. We work with families on a daily basis, solving their problems, helping them to individually follow their path and to mutually work together. Hinduism teaches them the ideals of dharma, which includes duty, selflessness, virtue and faith. When dharma is the shared ideal of every family member—as opposed to self-fulfillment or social-economic objectives—it is easier to navigate troubled waters, easier to persist in seasons of loss or lack, in times of emotional or mental difficulty.

VOICES: Looking back to my early years, it was the scriptures that tied our family together. I would hear father and grandfather chanting the Vedic mantras together in the early hours of each day. Everyone I know held the highest esteem for the Vedas, the very voice of God, elders would say. I knew they were old, and everyone said they were profound. But it was not until I was in my teens that I really discovered the Upanishads. Such beauty, such profundity, such humor and insight I had never before or since known. I would spend hours with the texts, talking with my parents and friends, wondering myself how these men, so many thousands of years ago, had gained all that wisdom—more, it seemed to me then, than people had today. Through the years I have seen so many families whose lives revolve around the sacred texts. While all honor the Vedas, for some the heart is moved by the Gita, the epics, the Tirumurai or maybe their own family guru's writings composed only decades ago. Whatever texts they are, it's quite clear in my experience that sacred texts do much to bind a family together in thought.

Then there is faith in karma. The Hindu family believes, in its

ciation is life's most grand and glorious path, and the singular path for those seeking life's ultimate goal, Realization of God as timeless, formless, spaceless Absolute Reality, that mystic treasure reserved for the renunciate. Know, too, that renunciation is not merely an attitude, a mental posture which can be equally assumed by the householder and the renunciate. Our scriptures proclaim that a false concept. My order supports the scriptural doctrine that the two paths—householder and renunciate—are distinct in their dharmas and attainments, affirming that true renunciation may not be achieved by those in the world even by virtue of a genuine attitude of detachment. The householder may attain great and profound spiritual depths during his life, unfolding the mysteries of existence in his or her states of contemplation and, according to our ancient mystics, perhaps experiencing total God Realization at the hour of death, though this attainment is reserved for the ardent, sincere and devout grihastha. Many years ago, my satguru, Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, wrote the following poem to honor those valiant souls on the path of renunciation.

*Hail, O sannyasin, love's embodiment!
Does any power exist apart from love?
Diffuse thyself throughout the happy world.
Let painful maya cease and ne'er return!
Day and night give praise unto the Lord.
Pour forth a stream of songs to melt the very stones.
Attain the sight where night is not nor day.
See Siva everywhere, and rest in bliss.
Live without interest in worldly gain.
Here, as thou hast ever been, remain.
Then never will cruel sorrow venture nigh.*

*Best of sannyasins, of one-pointed mind!
Morning and evening worship without fail
The holy feet of the Almighty Lord,
Who here and hereafter preserves and safeguards thee.
Cast aside the fetters of thy sins!
By steadfast concentration of thy mind
Awareness of a separate self thou must extirpate.*

*Conquer with love all those that censure thee.
Thou art eternal! Have no doubt of this!
What is not thou is fancy's artifice.
Formless thou art!
Then live from all thought free!*

THE IDEALS OF FAMILY LIFE

If both husband and wife are on the spiritual path, the householder family will progress beautifully and deeply. Their love for one another and their offspring maintains family harmony. However, the nature of their sadhana and unfoldment of the spirit is different from that of the sannyasin. The family unit itself is a magnetic-force structure, a material structure, for they are involved in the objects and relationships of the world. It is the family's effort to be "in the world but not of it" that gives the impetus for insight and the awakening of the soul. The struggle to maintain the responsibilities of the home and children while simultaneously observing the contemplative way, in itself, provides strength and balance, and slowly matures innate wisdom through the years.

The successful Hindu householder family is stable, an asset to the larger community in which it lives, an example of joyous, contented relationships. Members of the family are more interested in serving than being served. They accept responsibility for one another. They are pliable, flexible, able to flow freely like water. They worship and meditate daily without fail and strictly observe their individual sadhanas. Their insight is respected and their advice sought. Yet, they do not bring the world into the home, but guard and protect the home vibration as the spiritual center of their life. Their commitments are always first to the family, then to the community. Their home remains sacrosanct, apart from the world, a place of reflection, growing and peace. They intuitively know the complex workings of the world, the forces and motivations of people, and often guide others to perceptive action. Yet, they do not display exclusive spiritual knowledge or put themselves above their fellow man.

Problems for them are merely challenges, opportunities for growth. Forgetting themselves in their service to the family and their fellow man, they become the pure channel for love and light.



THOMAS KELLY



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DESHAKALYAN CHOWDHURY



THOMAS KELLY



PHAL GIROTA/PQRS



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The virtuous householder supports the needs of renunciates, ancestors and the poor. Tirukural, verse 41

Scenes from Family Life

Father and daughter arrive at a temple in Sri Lanka; women pray at a shrine in Ujjain; ladies throw colored powder during the jubilant Holi festival; shopping at a roadside market in Jaffna, Sri Lanka; a mom and dad reading to their son; taking a stroll in sunny Tirupati; a young couple wait in queue for darshan of Sri Venkateshwara

heart, that even life's difficulties are part of God's purpose and the fruition of each member's past karmas. To go through things together is natural, expected, accepted. Breaking up, divorcing, separating—such reactions to stress don't resolve karmas that were brought into this life to go through. In fact, they make things worse, create new, unseemly karmas and thus further need for perhaps even more sorrowful births. The belief in karma—the law by which our thoughts, words and deeds reap their natural reactions—helps hold a family together, not unlike the crew of a storm-tossed ship would never think of jumping overboard when the going gets rough, but work together to weather the crisis, with their shared goal lying beyond the immediate difficulty.

Thus, difficult experiences can be serenely endured by the practicing Hindu. Know-

ing this in her heart, a Hindu wife in Kuala Lumpur can find solace in the midst of the death of a child. Knowing this in his heart, a Hindu father in Bangalore can sustain periods of privation and business failure. Each finds the strength to go on.

VOICES: *There is a beautiful word in the Hindi language, shukur, which means acceptance. Sometimes it's very hard to accept the cards life deals one, yet the Hindu belief in the acceptance of God's will makes it possible to bear incredible hardships. A young friend of my husband went into a coma after going in for preventive surgery. They gave him too much chloroform, and he never came out of the coma. He was a young man, his children were young. In the beginning, his wife was frantic, weeping all the time. Yet, her beliefs were solid as a rock within her, gradually calming her. It's now five years later, and she's picked up the pieces of her life. Yet she never forgets to have her pujas;*



A. MANIVEL

A Saivite father shares the teachings with his wife and children

her husband's picture is always there in the ritual ceremonies. His presence is there in the family. She seems to know that the soul cannot die, that his spirit lives on. Every year on his death anniversary, we all gather for the ritual ceremonies. Everybody feels the grief, and each religion teaches you to cope in a different way. Her belief in the undying soul gives her a little solace. She constantly has the prayers and the satsangas at home, and they help her in the changing patterns of her life.

There are many other ideals that help a family survive in Hinduism. An important one is that father and mother are the children's first guru, first teacher of things of the spirit. This brings a deep honoring to the parent-child relationship. Such a tie transcends the physical, emotional, intellectual relationship that is the sum of some family bonds. It brings an air of sacredness into the interactions, a deeper reverencing which powerfully connects a daughter or son to his mother and father. One sees this expressed so beautifully in the traditional family when young ones gently and lovingly touch the feet of their parents. They are worshiping the Divine in their parents and thus being prepared to see God in everyone.

In the strict Hindu family, there is a clear and well-understood hierarchy, based fundamentally on age. Younger members are taught to respect and follow the directions from their elders, and to cherish and protect those younger than themselves. Even differences of a few months are respected. Many problems that could arise in less-structured families—and do, as proven in the modern nuclear family—simply never come up. There is less vying for attention, less ego conflict, less confusion about everyone's role and place. With the lines of seniority known to all, regulations, changes and cooperative exchanges flow freely among family members.

VOICES: *In the family life, thousands of years ago, a Hindu was told, "Matridevo bhava, pitridevo bhava, acharya devo bhava." This Sanskrit dictum means, "Be the one who respects his mother as God, his father as God and his guru or teacher as God." Such an ultimate reverence for the elders creates a profound, serene feeling and certainly prepares the mind to receive the good and loving advice from them in the proper spirit. Bowing down before the elders in respectful salutation and touching their feet is an exclusively Hindu custom. When such a deep respect is accorded to family members,*

Intuition unfolds naturally. What is unspoken is more tangible than what is said. Their timing is good, and abundance comes. They live simply, guided by real need and not novel desire. They are creative, acquiring and using skills such as making their own clothing, growing food, building their own house and furniture. The inner knowing awakened by their meditations is brought directly into the busy details of everyday life. They use the forces of procreation wisely to produce the next generation and not as instinctive indulgence. They worship profoundly and seek and find spiritual revelation in the midst of life.

Maintaining a Balance of Forces

Within each family, the man is predominantly in the *pingala* force. The woman is predominantly in the *ida* force. When the energies are the other way around, disharmony is the result. When they live together in harmony and have awakened enough innate knowledge of the relation of their forces to balance them, then both are in the *sushumna* force and can soar into the Divinity within.

Children born to such harmonious people come through from the deeper chakras and tend to be highly evolved and well balanced.

Should the woman become aggressively intellectual and the man become passively physical, then forces in the home are disturbed. The two bicker and argue. Consequently, the children are upset, because they only reflect the vibration of the parents and are guided by their example. Sometimes the parents separate, going their own ways until the conflicting forces quiet down. But when they come back together, if the wife still remains in the *pingala* channel, and the husband in the *ida* channel, they will generate the same inharmonious conditions. It is always a question of who is the head of the house, he or she? The head is always the one who holds the *pranas* within the *pingala*. Two *pingala* spouses in one house, husband and wife, spells conflict.

The balancing of the *ida* and *pingala* into *sushumna* is, in fact, the pre-ordained spiritual *sadhana*, a built-in *sadhana*, or birth *sadhana*, of all family persons. To be on the spiritual path,

to stay on the spiritual path, to get back on the spiritual path, to keep the children on the spiritual path, to bring them back to the spiritual path, too—as a family, father, mother, sons and daughters living together as humans were ordained to do without the intrusions of uncontrolled instinctive areas of the mind and emotions—it is imperative, it is a virtual command of the soul of each member of the family, that these two forces, the *ida* and *pingala*, become and remain balanced, first through understanding and then through the actual accomplishment of this *sadhana*.

One thing to remember: the family man is the guru of his household. If he wants to find out how to be a good guru, he just has to observe his own *satguru*, that is all he has to do. He will learn through observation. Often this is best accomplished by living in the guru's ashrama periodically to perform *sadhana* and service. Being head of his home does not mean he is a dominant authority figure, arrogantly commanding unconditional obedience, such as Bollywood and Hollywood portray. No. He must assume full responsibility for his family and guide subtly and wisely, with love

always flowing. This means that he must accept the responsibility for the conditions in the home and for the spiritual training and unfoldment of his wife and children. This is his *purusha* dharma. To not recognize and not follow it is to create much *kukarma*, bad actions, bringing back hurtful results to him in this or another life.

When the wife has problems in fulfilling her womanly duties, *stri* dharma, it is often because the husband has not upheld his duty, nor allowed her to fulfill hers. When he does not allow her to or fails to insist that she perform her *stri* dharma and give her the space and time to do so, she creates *kukarmas* which are equally shared by him. This is because the *purusha* karmic duty and obligation of running a proper home naturally falls upon him, as well as upon her. So, there are great penalties to be paid by the man, husband and father for failure to uphold his *purusha* dharma.

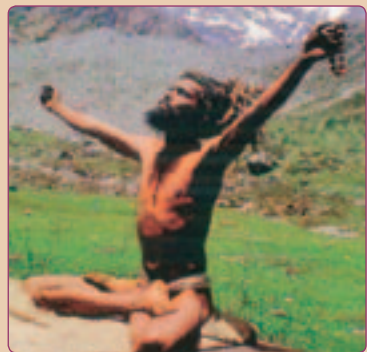
Of course, when the children “go wrong” and are corrected by the society at large, both husband and wife suffer and equally share in the *kukarmas* created by their offspring. In summary, the husband took the wife into his home and is therefore responsible



THOMASPRADIP GUPTA/DINODIA



HINDUISM TODAY



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



COURTESY BAPS



RAMAKRISHNA MISSION



THOMAS KELLY

The Scriptures exalt above every other good the greatness of virtuous renunciates. Tirukural, verse 21

Scenes from Monastic Life

Sadhvis meditating in Hardwar; Swami Arunagirinatha, head of Madurai Aadheenam; a yogi in bliss; Swami Chidananda Sarasvati, head of Divine Life Society, giving darshan; sadhus of Swaminarayanan Fellowship (BAPS) with their guru; Swami Gautamananda, head of Chennai's RK Mission; Swami Achalanand Ji Maharaj of Jodhpur offers words of wisdom

no wonder the family bonds are strong and they remain unified.

Daily worship in the home is a unique Hindu contribution to family sharing. Of course, faith is a shared experience in all religious households. But the Hindu takes it a step further, sanctifying the home itself with a beautiful shrine room—a kind of miniature temple right in the house. The father or oldest son is the family's liturgist, leading others in daily ritual. Others care for the sacred implements, gather fresh flowers for the morning rites and decorate for holy days or festivals. In Hindu culture, family and spirituality are intimately intertwined.

VOICES: Every Hindu family in our village had a home shrine where the family members worship their Gods. Even the poorest set aside a place for this. Rituals are periodic celebrations which are religious and spiritual in character, and they address the inward feelings rather than



A. MANIVEL

The preceptor is approached for blessings, and guidance

outward. Such pujas and rituals give an individual a chance to pause, look inward and concentrate on something more meaningful, more profound, than mere materialism and the daily drudgery of life. Worships and rejoicings in the name of God,

fasting and observances of special days enable people to look beyond the day-to-day life to a larger scheme of things. In the best homes I know, the father performs the rites daily, and the family joins and assists. I guess it's like the old adage, “The family that prays together stays together.” Even in the busy rat race of life in cosmopolitan cities like Mumbai or Los Angeles, there are many Hindus who perform at least a mini puja daily. They claim that even the small ritual of a few minutes a day makes them concentrate, feel elevated spiritually, brings their minds on an even keel, enabling them to perform better in their line of work.

Another family tradition is the *kulaguru*, or family preceptor. Though it is not required that

every member of a Hindu family have the same *guru*, it often happens that way. This gives all members a shared spiritual point of reference, a voice whose wisdom will be sought in times of decision, difference or unclarity, a voice that will also be listened to, its advice followed. That means that there is a kind of outside counselor, a mediator to work out deadlocks, a referee to arbitrate and settle disputes. Thus, the family need never be stuck in some irresolvable impasse. The *kulaguru's* counsel can be trusted to transcend the personalities involved, to be impersonal and just. And that simple practice can bring a family through many a quandary.

Hindu heritage gives a strong definition to the growth and maturing of family members, through the application of the *ashramas*. Every member in a family is expected to spend the first twenty-four years or so in the *brahmacharya*, or student, stage. It's a time of learning, studying, serving and growing up. Then comes the stage of the *grihastha*, or householder, and with it marriage, children and social responsibilities. These stages are informally defined in nearly every culture, but in Hinduism the definitions are elaborately detailed beyond raising the family. Sometime

around fifty, every member enters the *vanaprastha ashrama*, a stage of advisor and elder. By formalizing this stage, the Hindu family gives a place of prominence and usefulness to its senior citizens. They do not just retire, and they certainly are not sent off to a retirement home. Rather, their advice is sought, their years of experience drawn upon. Thus, Hinduism gives a place to those who have served the family in their youth but, with age, can no longer serve in that same way. They have a new place. Far from being a lesser function, it is a place of greater honor. This is one of the greatest gifts that the traditional Hindu family offers, thus averting one of the greatest tragedies: depriving elders of due recognition.

VOICES: My mother-in-law, right up till she died in her seventies, was the head of the household. She could do anything with my children, and I wouldn't have the guts to tell her no. She would put kohl, mascara, adorning their eyes and oil in their hair, and their eyes would be black and their hair greasy, but I wouldn't say anything to her. She would bribe the kids with candy, and they loved her for it. It's a loving relationship, because you do something for someone and they do something for you. The blessings do come on you because she felt very wanted and happy. She taught me the sanctity

for her well-being. Together they bring the children into their home and are responsible for them, spiritually, socially, culturally, economically, as well as for their education.

What does it mean to be the spiritual head of the house? He is responsible for stabilizing the *pranic* forces, both positive, negative and mixed. When the magnetic, materialistic forces become too strong in the home, or out of proper balance with the others, he has to work within himself in early morning *sadhana* and deep meditation to bring through the spiritual forces of happiness, contentment, love and trust. By going deep within himself, into his soul nature, he uplifts the spiritual awareness of the entire family into one of the higher chakras.

The family woman has to be a good mother. To achieve this, she has to learn to flow her awareness with the awareness of the children. She has been through the same series of experiences the children are going through. She intuitively knows what to do next. As a mother, she fails only if she neglects the children, takes her awareness completely away, leaving the children to flounder. But if she stays close, attends to each child's needs, is there when

he or she cries or comes home from school, everything is fine. The child is raised perfectly. This occurs if the wife stays in the home, stabilizing the domestic force field, where she is needed most, allowing the husband to be the breadwinner and stabilizer of the external force field, which is his natural domain.

The Hindu woman is trained to perform her *stri* dharma from the time she is a little girl. She finds ways to express her natural creativity within the home itself. She may write poetry or become an artist. Perhaps she has a special talent for sewing or embroidery or gardening or music. She can learn to loom cloth and make the family's clothing. If needed, she can use her skills to supplement the family income without leaving the home. There are so many ways for a Hindu wife and mother to fully use her creative energies, including being creative enough to never let her life become boring. It is her special blessing that she is free to pursue her religion fully, to study the scriptures, to sing bhajana and keep her own spiritual life strong inside.

If each understands—or at least the family man understands, for it is his home—how the forces have to be worked within it,

and realizes that he, as a man, flows through a different area of the mind than does his wife in fulfilling their respective, but very different, birth karmas, then everything remains harmonious. He thinks; she feels. He reasons and intellectualizes, while she reasons and emotionalizes. He is in his realm. She is in her realm. He is not trying to make her adjust to the same area of the mind that he is flowing through. And, of course, if she is in her realm, she will not expect him to flow through her area of the mind, because women just do not do this.

Usually it is the man who does not want to, or understand how to, become the spiritual head of his house. Often he wants the woman to flow through his area of the mind, to be something of a brother and pal or partner to him. Therefore, he experiences everything that goes along with brothers and pals and partners: arguments, fights, scraps and good times. In an equal relationship of this kind, the forces of the home are not building or becoming strong, for such a home is not a sanctified place in which they can bring inner-plane beings into reincarnation from the higher celestial realms. If they do have children under these conditions, they simply take

“potluck” off the lower astral plane, or Pretaloka.

A man goes through his intellectual cycles in facing the problems of the external world. A woman has to be strong enough, understanding enough, to allow him to go through those cycles. A woman goes through emotional cycles and feeling cycles as she lives within the home, raises the family and takes care of her husband. He has to be confident enough to understand and allow her to go through those cycles.

Rather than arguing or talking about their cycles, the man who is spiritual head of his house meditates to stabilize the forces within himself. He withdraws the physical energies from the *pingala* and the *ida* currents into *sushumna* in his spine and head. He breathes regularly, sitting motionless until the forces adjust to his inner command. When he comes out of his meditation, if it really was a meditation, she sees him as a different being, and a new atmosphere and relationship are created in the home immediately. The children grow up as young disciples of the mother and the father. As they mature, they learn of inner things. It is the duty of the mother and the father to give to the child at a very early



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REUTERS/JAYANTA SHAW

KUMAR BHOOBUN

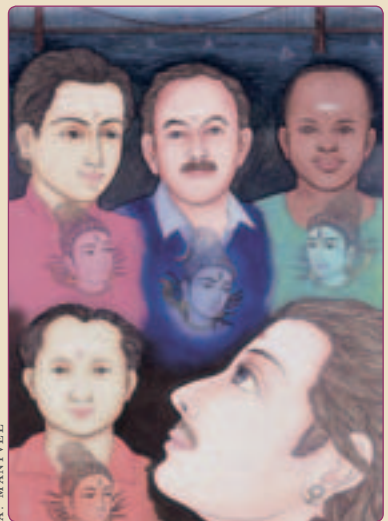
He who rightly pursues the householder's life here on Earth will be rightfully placed among the Gods there in Heaven. Tirukrual, verse 10

Scenes from Family Life

A tiny infant in loving arms; women at the market in Nepal; boys meditate at the Tirunavakarasu Ashram/Gurukulam in Sri Lanka; a family perform havan, the Vedic fire ceremony; a young family, heads shaven as an act of penance, enjoy rice and curry prasadam at Tirupati Temple; a devotee sings devotional hymns; renowned dancer Paolomi Ashwinkumar

of the family unit and respect for elders.

It is significant that Hindus, numbering over one billion today, constitute sixteen percent of the human race. One out of every six people on the planet is a Hindu. So, the ability of that large community to preserve its strengths, to pass on its values and cultural treasures, to protect its members and keep them well and fulfilled is important. Important does not suffice. Crucial, really. On the optimistic side, as much as eighty percent of Hindus live in rural India, in the 700,000 small villages which remain less affected by outside influences and thus retain the promise of carrying on the traditional ways, including language, religion and custom. As all the foregoing amply indicates, the Hindu concept of



A devotee sees God in everyone

family is unique in many ways.

There is a more cosmic definition taught by every grandma and village elder, that in truth all of us on Earth are the creation of the One Great God; thus, in the broadest sense, we belong to a single family. *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*—"The whole world is one family." That's not an innovative notion derived from New Age insights or Gaia ecology. It's been part of Indian folk culture for thousands of years.

VOICES: *I was always taught that we as Hindus must have a magnanimous attitude, that our Hindu religion visualizes the entire Earth as one family. But while looking at all human beings as one family, I also saw that elders deeply considered the smaller family unit, the dynamism of its members' relationships with one another, and the pivotal role the institution of family plays in building the society.*

India's Venerable Renunciate Tradition

Renunciation and asceticism have been integral components of Hindu culture and religion from the earliest days, the most highly honored facet of the Hindu Dharma. The ideal of the life-long celibate monastic, living within the social order and yet freed from worldly obligation that he might find and shed his spiritual light, started before the Mohenjodaro and Harappa civilizations of five thousand years ago and traces its development in the references in the *Rig Veda*; to the *munis* and the *yatis*, men who wore long hair and yellow robes, such men as Sanatkumara, Datatreya and others, all *naishtika brahmacharis* [lifelong celibates]. Later in the *Vedas* the sannyasa ashrama, or last stage of the four-fold division of life, became formalized, and many references are made to those who after age seventy-two relinquished all in search of the Absolute.

The ancient shastras recognize four justifiable motivations for entering into sannyasa: *vidvat*, *vividisha*, *markata* and *atura*. *Vid-*

vat ("knowing; wise") sannyasa is the spontaneous withdrawal from the world in search for Self Realization which results from karma and tendencies developed in a previous life. *Vividisha* ("discriminating") sannyasa is renunciation to satisfy a yearning for the Self developed through scriptural study and practice. *Markata* sannyasa is taking refuge in sannyasa as a result of great sorrow, disappointment or misfortune in worldly pursuits. *Atura* ("suffering or sick") sannyasa is entering into sannyasa upon one's deathbed, realizing that there is no longer hope in life.

Renunciation of the world found a high expression in the monastic principles of Jainism and Buddhism, both religions founded by illustrious sons of India. Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, was born and died a Hindu in the seventh century bce. He himself cherished, lived and promulgated the ascetic ideal within the compass of Hinduism, and his followers made a separate religion of his teachings after his death. It is only in Hinduism and the Hindu-

age his first religious training and his education in attention, concentration, observation and meditation.

The parents must be fully knowledgeable of what their child is experiencing. During the first seven years, the child will go through the chakra of memory. He will be learning, absorbing, observing. The second seven years will be dedicated to the development of reason, as the second chakra unfolds. If theirs is a boy child, he is going through the *pingala*. If a girl child, she is going through the *ida* current and will go through emotional cycles.

Religion begins in the home under the mother's influence and instruction. The mother goes to the temple to get strong. That is the reason Hindus live near a temple. They go to the temple to draw strength from the shakti of the Deity, and they return to the home where they maintain a similar vibration in which to raise the next generation to be staunch and wonderfully productive citizens of the world, to bring peace on Earth, to keep peace on Earth. There is an ancient South Indian proverb which says one should not live in a city which has no temple.

By both spouses' respecting the differences between them and understanding where each one is flowing in consciousness, there is a give and take in the family, a beautiful flow of the forces. The *acharyas* and swamis work with the family man and woman to bring them into inner states of being so that they can bring through to the Earth a generation of great inner souls. It is a well-ordered cycle. Each one plays a part in the cycle, and if it is done through wisdom and understanding, a family home is created that has the same vibration as the temple or a contemplative monastery.

A contemplative home where the family can meditate has to have that uplifting, temple-like vibration. In just approaching it, the *sushumna* current of the man should withdraw awareness from the *pingala* current deep within. That is what the man can do when he is the spiritual head of the home.

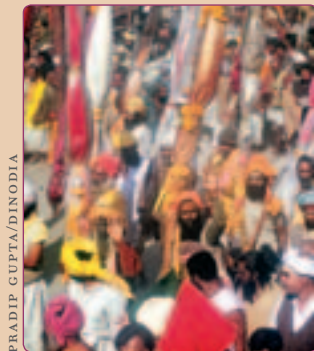
From the point of view of the Second World, or astral plane, the home is the family temple, and the wife and mother is in charge of that spiritual environment. The husband can come into that sanctum sanctorum but should not bring the world

into it. He will naturally find a refuge in the home if she is doing her duty. He will be able to regain his peace of mind there, renew himself for the next day in the stressful situations that the outside world is full of. In this technological age a man needs this refuge. He needs that inner balance in his life. When he comes home, she greets him at the entrance and performs a rite of purification and welcome, offering *arati* to cleanse his aura. This and other customs protect the sanctity of the home. When he enters that sanctuary and she is in her soul body and the child is in its soul body, then he becomes consciously conscious in his soul body, called *anan-damaya kosha* in Sanskrit. He leaves the conscious mind, which is a limited, external state of mind and not a balanced state of mind. He enters the intuitive mind. He gets immediate and intuitive answers to his worldly problems.

A woman depends on a man for physical and emotional security. She depends on herself for her inner security. He is the guide and the example. A man creates this security by setting a positive spiritual example. When she sees him in meditation, and sees light around his head and light within his spine, she feels secure.

She knows that his intuition is going to direct his intellect. She knows he will be decisive, fair, clear-minded in the external world. She knows that when he is at home, he turns to inner and more spiritual things. He controls his emotional nature and he does not scold her if she has a hard time controlling her emotional nature, because he realizes that she lives more in the *ida* force and goes through emotional cycles. In the same way, she does not scold him if he is having a terrible time intellectually solving several business problems, because she knows he is in the intellectual force, and that is what happens in that realm of the mind. She devotes her thought and energies to making the home comfortable and pleasant for him and for the children. He devotes his thought and energies to providing sustenance and security for that home.

The man seeks understanding through observation. The woman seeks harmony through devotion. He must observe what is going on within the home, not talk too much about it, other than to make small suggestions, with much praise and virtually no criticism. He must remember that his wife is making a home for him, and he should appreciate the vibration she creates. If he is doing well in his



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HINDUISM TODAY



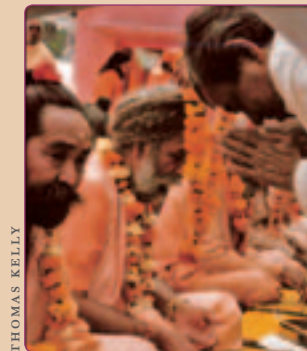
THOMAS KELLY



YOGA IN DAILY LIFE, SLOVAKIA



THOMAS KELLY



THOMAS KELLY

Domestic life is rightly called virtue. The monastic path, rightly lived beyond blame, is likewise good. Tirukural, verse 9

Meetings of the Ways

Sadhus march with dandas at the Kumbha Mela; Swamis in South Africa conclave with lay leaders; Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami chats with a young seeker; Swami Avdheshananda Ji Giri speaks on Hinduism; the mayor of Bratislava, Slovakia, cuts the ribbon with Swami Maheshwarananda to his new yoga center; sadhus in procession; saints give blessings

inspired religions of Jainism and Buddhism that asceticism is a vibrant and valued mode of life, a part of the natural dharma. Though the homeless sadhu and the wandering mendicant existed before, it was Gautama Buddha who around six hundred years bce, organized what had been an individual *sadhana* into a monastic order, which he termed the *sanga*. In the early 9th century, Adi Shankaracharya, the great exemplar of the ideals of sannyasa who revitalized and restored the ancient ways during his short life of thirty-two years, organized the Hindu monastics of his day. In his travels throughout India, he assessed the existing traditions and finally validated ten orders of ascetics, at the same time establishing four religious centers or *pithas* in the North, East, South and West of India, known respectively as Jyotih, Govardhana, Sringeri and Sharada. Each Dasanami order is loosely associated with one of the four centers. A fifth prominent *pitha*, associated with Sringeri Matha, is in Kanchipuram, also in the South. Thus, the ancient order of sannyasa extends back to time immemorial, structurally influenced by Gautama Buddha about twenty-five centuries ago and revital-

ized in its present form by Adi Shankaracharya around twelve hundred years ago.

Today the total number of monks in India and the world is not known for sure. Estimates range from one million to as high as five million, as there is naturally no official census or way of counting those who live this reclusive life. One of the largest of Hindu orders is the sadhu order known as Juna Akhara, which has 150,000 sadhus. *Sadhu* means "virtuous one," and is a holy man dedicated to the search for God. There are thirteen such sadhu *akharas*. The Juna Akhara and Niranjani Akhara are the most prominent. Others include the Agan, Alakhiya, Abhana, Anand, Mahanirvani and Atal. Most of these orders are considered Saivite; three are Vaishnavite (formed beginning in 1299 by Saint Ramananda Ji) and a few are Sikh orders patterned after the Hindu monastic system. *Akhara* is a Hindi term meaning "wrestling arena." It can mean either a place of verbal debate or one of physical combat. Sadhus of the various *akharas* may also hold allegiance to one of the ten Dasanami orders: Saraswati, Puri, Bana, Tirtha, Giri, Parvati, Bharati,

Aranya, Ashrama and Sagara. Thus, the *akharas* overlap with the Dasanami system. The *akharas*' dates of founding range from the sixth to the fourteenth century, though large monastic orders have existed throughout India's long history. Several *akharas* run hundreds of ashramas, schools and service institutions.

The majority of sadhus live in various *akhara* camps scattered all over India. Holy cities, including Rishikesh, Haridwar, Nashik, Prayag, Varanasi, Vrindavan and Ujjain have permanent *akhara* camps. Many sadhus move constantly from one camp to another. Those swamis and sadhus who are not a part of an *akhara* live in independent *mathas* and ashramas situated all over the country, or wander as mendicants. There is also the important *aadheenam* tradition, not



A. MANIVEL

associated with the dasanami orders, a series of ancient monastery-temple complexes in Tamil Nadu.

A large number of *sadhvis*, women monks, perhaps as many as 100,000, are a part of the *akhara* system, though they live separately from the men, and even during the massive Kumbha Mela festivals they have separate camps.

There are also sannyasin orders, such as the Nathas, that exist outside the Dasanami and *akhara* systems.

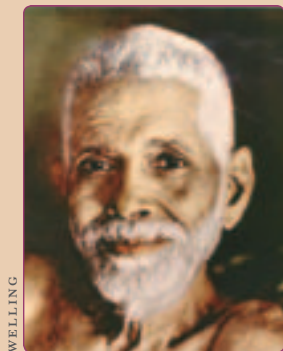
Additionally, several large cenobitic orders have branches outside India, such as the Ramakrishna Mission, with 1,000 sannyasins; Swaminarayan Gadi, with 1,500 sadhus; BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, with 700 sadhus and *brahmacharis*; and the Chinmaya Mission,

inner life, is steady and strong, and she is devoted, she will flow along in inner life happily also. She must strive to be one with him, to back him up in his desires and his ambitions and what he wants to accomplish in the outside world. This makes him feel strong and stand straight with head up. She can create a successful man of her husband very easily by using her wonderful intuitive powers. Together they make a contemplative life by building the home into a temple-like vibration, so blissful, so uplifting.

In the home, the mother is likened to the Shakti Deity. She is the power, the very soul of the home. None other. So she has to be there. She has to be treated sensitively and kindly, and with respect. She has to be given all the things she needs and everything she wants so she will release her shakti power to support her husband, so that he is successful in all his manly endeavors. When she is hurt, depressed, frustrated or disappointed, she automatically withdraws that power, compromising his success in the outside world along with it. People will draw away from him. His job, business or creative abilities will suffer. This is her great *siddhi*, her inborn power, which Hindu women know so well.

How can he not be successful in his *purusha* dharma in the outside world when he has the backing of a good wife? She is naturally perceptive, naturally intuitive. She balances out his intellect, softens the impact of the forces which dash against his nervous system from morning to night. Encouragement and love naturally radiate out from her as she fulfills her *stri* dharma. Without these balancing elements in his life, a man becomes too externalized, too instinctive.

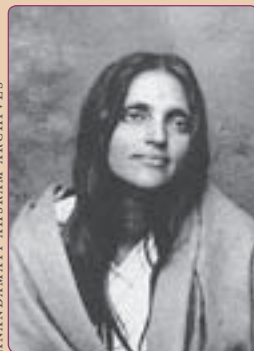
It is the man's duty, his *purusha* dharma, to provide for her and for the children. The husband should provide her with all the fine things, with a good house which she then makes into a home, with adornments, gold and jewels and clothes, gold hanging down until her ears hurt, more bracelets, more things to keep her in the home so she is feeling secure and happy. In return she provides a refuge, a serene corner of the world where he can escape from the pressures of daily life, where he can regain his inner perspective, perform his religious *sadhana* and meditations, then enjoy his family. Thus, she brings happiness and peace of mind to her family, to the community and to the world.



WELLING



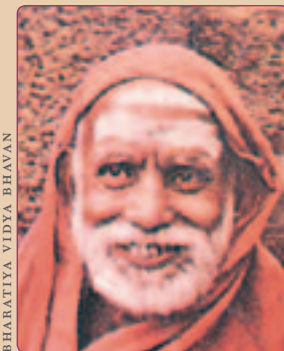
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ANANDAMAYI AHSRAM ARCHIVES



HINDUISM TODAY



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

Mahatmas

Ramana Maharshi; Swami Chidananda Saraswati; Anandamayi Ma; Trichy Mahaswamigal; Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati

with 100 swamis and swaminis.

The famed Kumbha Mela is fundamentally a gathering of the great monastic orders of India. At the high point of the Mela festivals, hundreds of thousands of renunciate monks travel in grand procession to a nearby river's edge for the *shahi snan*, "royal bath," while pilgrims line the streets to receive their blessings. The Kumbha Mela is a time to elect new *akhara* leadership, discuss and solve problems, consult with the other *akharas*, meet with devotees and initiate new monastics.

There are countless sadhus on the roads, byways, mountains, riverbanks, and in the ashramas and caves of India. They have, by their very existence, a profound, stabilizing effect on the consciousness of India and the world. It is well known that through their austerity and renunciation, the sadhus and sannyasins help consume and balance out the karma of the community at large. They are honored for the unseen benefits in the wise culture of India, and many people help support them with donations.

Today, Hindu monastics and their institutions are, for the

most part, growing, thriving, while monastic traditions in other faiths are facing an erosion of numbers. This bodes well for the future of Hinduism, for the monastics are the spiritual guides and inspirers.

While Hindu monasticism is not a centralized system, it does have a competent and substantial organized leadership of guru revered by their followers. There are also various oversight bodies. Among the *akharas*, for example, there is the Akhara Parishad and the Chatur Sampradaya. The Delhi-based assembly, the Acharya Sangam, is a voice for some 15,000 sadhus.

Contrary to modern misconceptions, Hindu monks and families are closely associated, each helping the other in their chosen expression of dharma. Many sadhus and swamis personally guide the lives of hundreds of families. Many run institutions that provide social service. Even orders that keep their distance from society work to bring the philosophical teachings to the masses. Others live a strictly reclusive life, going deep to the source of existence in their meditations and uplifting mankind through their mere existence.

Beware Vaccinations

Lifesavers that they've been, proliferation of childhood vaccinations brings its own hazards

BY DR. VIRENDER SODHI

ALTHOUGH IMMUNIZATION HAS SUCCESSFULLY REDUCED the incidence of diseases such as smallpox and polio, vaccination can cause side effects, some minor and some quite major. We have reached the point where the side effects may pose more risk than the disease being vaccinated against. It is even possible that the widespread use of vaccines is contributing to the trend of deteriorating health among North American children. More children are being vaccinated for more diseases today—21 shots by the time they reach first grade. Evidence is everywhere. One survey found that children receiving the pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine were six times more likely to develop asthma than children not receiving this vaccine. In 1993, Japan suspended the use of mumps vaccine due to the high incidence of mumps meningitis as a complication. The Autism Research Unit at the University of Sunderland reports an increased incidence of parents' claiming that their child's autism was the result of, or compounded by, vaccination. Said one researcher, "Many times each week, we are contacted by parents who talk about the effect they saw when their child was vaccinated, often describing harrowing scenes of extremely rapid regression, from perfectly ordinary children to children who exhibit very severe behavioral and physiological problems." California's autism rate has mushroomed 1,000% over the past 20 years, with dramatic increases following the introduction of the measles-mumps-rebella (MMR) vaccine in the early 1980s. England also had dramatic increases in autism beginning in the 1990s, following the introduction of the MMR vaccine there.

International studies have implicated vaccination as a cause of SIDS. SIDS, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, is a "catch-all" diagnosis given when the specific cause of death is unknown. Estimates range from 5,000 to 10,000 cases each year in the US. One study found the peak incidence of SIDS occurred between the ages of two and four months in the US, precisely when the first two routine immunizations are given. In the 1970s, Japan raised their vaccination age from two months to two years. Their incidence of SIDS dropped dramatically. They went from an infant mortality ranking of 17 to first in the world. That is, by not immunizing infants, they achieved the lowest infant SIDS death rate in the world.

A study of 13,612 children ages two months to 16 years was published by the UCLA School of Public Health on the effects of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP) vaccine. It concluded, "Subjects who had been vaccinated were more likely to have histories of asthma, severe allergic reactions, and any allergy or allergic reaction. Vaccinated subjects were also more likely to have had sinusitis or sinus problems, or allergy related nose and eye symptoms in the past year. DTP or tetanus vaccination in children is associated with a lifetime history and twelve-month prevalence of many allergies and related respiratory symptoms. Vaccinations may be partly responsible for the increase of asthma and other allergic hypersensitivity disorders." Another study showed the risk of serious adverse reaction to the DTP vaccine as one in 1,750, while the

chances of dying from pertussis itself is just in one in several million.

Some vaccines make little sense, such as for hepatitis B. We know how the disease is contracted. The risk factors can be avoided, making the vaccination unnecessary. The side effects of the vaccination may be 100 times worse than getting the disease itself. A nine-year-old boy was brought to my clinic with a diagnosis of juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. While taking his history, it became evident that the immune system was triggered adversely following a hepatitis B vaccination. He developed a high fever and all his joints swelled. He was put on prednisolone, a powerful steroid with adverse effects itself. Finally, his parents sought my advice. After nine months of treatment and detoxification, he went into remission.

Vaccine ingredients include known toxicants and carcinogens such as thimerosal (a mercury derivative), aluminum phosphate, formaldehyde (for which the Poisons Information Centre in Australia claims there is no acceptable safe amount that can be injected into a living human body) and phenoxyethanol (your car's



antifreeze). Some infants receive 100 times the EPA's maximum allowable amount of mercury through vaccines. Some of these ingredients are gastrointestinal toxicants, liver toxicants, respiratory toxicants, neurotoxicants, cardiovascular and blood toxicants, reproductive toxicants and developmental toxicants—to name just a few of the known dangers. Chemical ranking systems rate many vaccine ingredients among the most hazardous substances, and they are heavily regulated. In the December 1994, *Medical Post*, Canadian author of the best-seller *Medical Mafia*, Guylaine Lancot, MD, stated, "The medical authorities keep lying. Vaccination has been a disaster on the immune system. It actually causes a lot of illnesses. We are changing our genetic code through vaccination. One hundred years from now we will know that the biggest crime against humanity was vaccines."

As a parent, you should be informed, and calculate the risk versus the benefit. My children are only vaccinated for polio and tetanus. They both got measles and chicken pox. They recovered without complication, thanks to natural medicine. If your kids have skin rash, diarrhea or some other serious condition, ask your doctor and get more information from the Internet before getting them vaccinated. If there is any family history of auto-immune disease, avoid vaccination, or delay it until the immune system is more mature. Mother's milk is the best vaccination for babies. Nutrition is of utmost importance. Eat organic, whole foods with plenty of fruits, vegetable, good oils, even organic butter or ghee. Add supplements. Vitamin A has been shown to reduce the mortality of measles. Zinc, B-vitamins and omega three and six oils are very beneficial. Hygiene is of utmost importance, as it will prevent a lot of disease. Traditionally, the holy basil plant was planted in the center of house, which warded off many varieties of bugs and has strong antiviral properties. Other antiviral, antibacterial plants planted around the house included neem, mango, acacia, amla and haritaki. Finally, remember that it is your duty and right to make a final decision whether or not to vaccinate your child.

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Meeting Lord Murugan

How my young son found religion in India

BY VATSALA SPERLING
ROCHESTER, VERMONT, USA

ON A 137-KILOMETER ROAD TRIP from Madurai to Palani Hills in South India, we saw many people walking. Ramakrishna, our young driver, explained to our six-year-old son Mahar, “These pilgrims have resolved to walk from their homes to Palani Temple. It will take them many days and nights. They carry their offerings on their heads and go barefoot. When Lord Murugan calls, you simply go.”

The atheist in Mahar must have winked with disbelief, thinking, “Ha ha. How can Murugan call? Statues don’t speak.” Ever since he turned two, Mahar had offered consistent protest to my daily puja worship at our home shrine. My husband Ehud and I had spoken to him softly as well as sternly about his opposition, but nothing had come of these conversations. Mahar’s resistance saddened me but Ehud, ever the optimist, always said, “Don’t worry. India will work on him.”

So here we were, in India, heading to Palani Temple, the most revered of all temples to Lord Murugan. When Mahar was born, we had made a resolution that we would visit Palani Temple and offer his birth hair to Lord Murugan. From our clean, roomy, air-conditioned car, Mahar watched hundreds of barefoot pilgrims passing by. Unmindful of the dismal, disorderly and often times filthy external conditions, the pilgrims set one foot in front of the other and marched on to visit Lord Murugan.

Normally, just like a seasoned lawyer, Mahar would have cross-examined Ramakrishna on his theory about “When Lord Murugan calls.” Instead, he watched the endless stream of pilgrims and asked him, “Do they eat, get water to drink, use rest stops? Do ghosts and goblins bother them at night?” Hmmm. Curiosity instead of world-weary skepticism—a good sign, I thought.

Due to the special celebration of Kritika in commemoration of the six Krittika women who raised Lord Murugan, the temple was flooded with pilgrims. Thousands of men in black dhotis were on the premises, too—pilgrims who were, in fact, on their way to Lord Ayyappa’s abode, Sabari Malai, and had resolved to visit every temple along the way. A sea of humanity, dripping with devotion, milled about with a single aim,

to have a darshan (sacred sight) of Lord Murugan. They stood in serpentine queue extending to eternity. “We might have to camp overnight,” Ehud said. But on a whim, we entered the Temple Administration Office to see if someone could help us.

Mr. E. Meikandar was in the office, as if by carefully plotted appointment, and asked, “How may I help you?” We loved this question and spoke with him about our desire to offer Mahar’s hair to Lord Murugan. Soon he was leafing through the articles that I have published in HINDUISM TODAY and he recognized the picture of its founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. “Hawaii Swami has visited this temple. He is real, you know,” Meikandar offered. He was enchanted by the books that I have authored, *How Ganesh Got His Elephant Head* and *How Parvati Won the Heart of Shiva*. And when he saw our wedding pictures in our book *A Marriage Made in Heaven*, he was overcome with joy. “You are more devoted than many Hindus,” he said to Ehud. “You must get in to see Lord Murugan. Come with me.” He literally pulled Ehud out of the administration office and we followed.

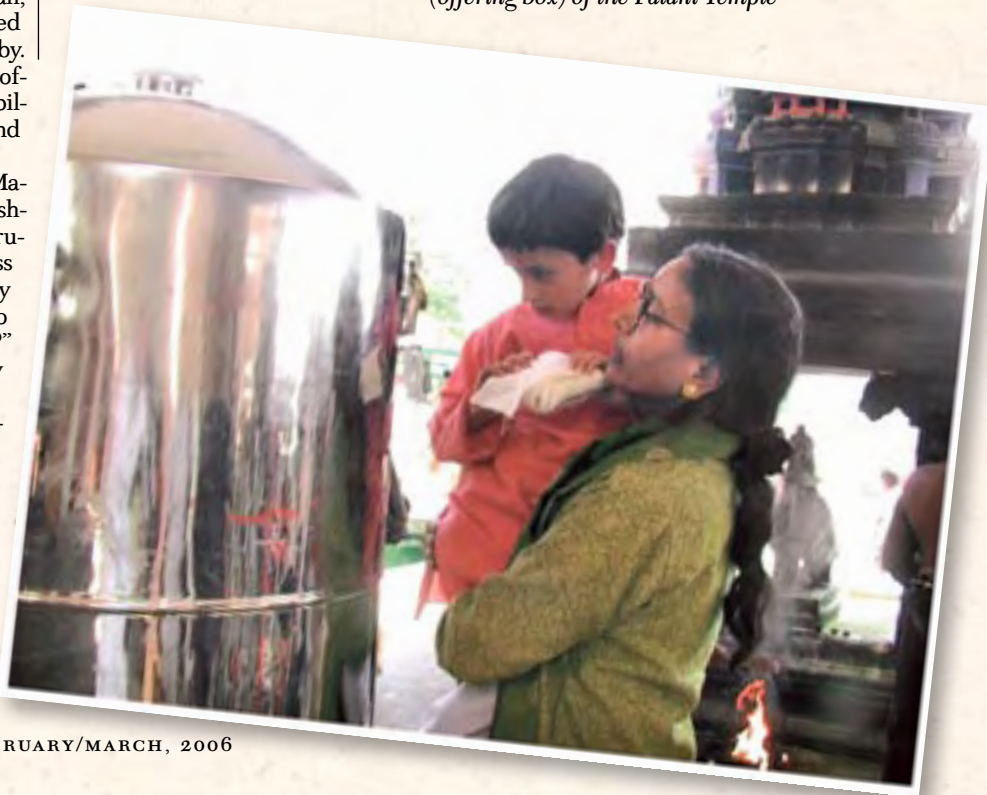
He gave us a grand tour of the



temple while explaining the beauty, myth, truth and legend. Mahar stayed very close to Mr. E. Meikandar, listening carefully. Soon we found ourselves seated on the floor a few feet away from the Deity. The priests offered a special archana worship for the three of us, smeared *vibuthi*, holy ash, on our foreheads, adorned Ehud with a rose garland from the feet of the God and said, “Be well.” Overwhelmed with emotion, I found myself crying. Mahar sat saucer-eyed, stunned and quiet. Ehud was ecstatic. Ramakrishna, overjoyed, said, “Murugan, the child’s hair, our prayers and ourselves are at your temple. Bless us with your grace.”

Behind us thousands of pilgrims murmured, chanted, sang and prayed. Smoke bellowed from burning camphor; incense and lamps hung low. Amidst the ringing of bells, priests continued doing archana after archana, ritual bathing after ritual bathing,

Offerings: Mahar and his mother, author Vatsala Sperling, place his birth hair into the giant hundi (offering box) of the Palani Temple



Murugan’s abode: (left) The gold-covered vimana over the temple’s central sanctum; (right) Palani Temple sits on a large hillock

smearing *vibhuti* on every forehead.

Coming out into the sunlit courtyard, we felt as though we had been ejected from the hot and dark womb of Mother Earth. Mahar did not wipe off the *vibhuti*, as he would certainly have done at home!

We began looking at a statue of Sage Bhogar and Meikandar told us about the sage, who is believed to be a contemporary of Sage Agastya, a rishi mentioned in the epic *Ramayana*. “Many thousands of years ago, Sage Bhogar lived on this hill,” began Meikandar. “He was very sick and had traveled all over the world looking for a cure. Disheartened and unsuccessful, he returned to this hill. One night Lord Siva appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Ask Murugan to heal you.’” Meikandar recounted how, according to the *Siva Purana*, the six-year-old Lord Murugan renounced the world upon losing a contest with his brother, Lord Ganesha, and took refuge on this hill. It is now one of the six power places, *shakti sthala*, of Lord Murugan.

“Saint Bhogar took the dream about Murugan to heart. He created an amalgam of nine minerals. Mixed with herbs, the amalgam became harder than rock. From it he sculpted a small statue of the child Murugan. Then he began a rigorous practice of collecting water every day from a pond on the plains below the hill. Each day he carried it up the hill and bathed the statue. He lived on the water that poured off the Deity from this sacred bath and was eventually healed from his illness, freed from his miserable disease.

“As legend has it, there is a vast system of tunnels and caves under the hill. No one has ever ventured near them. One day, Sage Bhogar went into a tunnel and never came out. Some believe he still lives on, but no one can see him,” Meikandar said.

Mahar was totally absorbed in the story of a statue not more than two feet high that had healing powers, and the invisible sage living in the subterranean network of tunnels. His fanciful imagination was surely engaged.

“The *nava pashana* (nine poisons) statue of unknown composition and formula has been bathed every day for thousands of years. Devotees have sipped the water from this bath with faith. Murugan is also bathed with *panchamritam*, five elixirs of immortality, honey, milk, ghee, yogurt and cow urine mixed with dates, banana, jagery and edible camphor. *Vibuthi* is also used for the bath. Then the entire statue of Lord Murugan is covered with a thick coat of *rakala chandanam* (a special sandalwood paste) that is allowed to dry overnight. All



these constitute the *prasadam* given to the pilgrims as they visit Lord Murugan from all over the world and pray to be healed,” Meikandar said, waving his hands over the milling crowd of devotees.

We were approaching the huge metal offering box where Meikandar advised us we could drop in our offering of birth hair. “Mom,” queried Mahar, “This man keeps saying that the pilgrims are praying to be healed. I don’t see any sick or injured people here. Everyone looks healthy and they’re so loud, chanting all these prayers. What sickness do they have?”

Finally, Mahar had caught up. His rational, logical brain was working, and he was asking a real question. At six years of age, he does study homeopathy with me at home. I talk to him about personal and social hygiene and tell him anecdotes from the good old days when I ran the clinical microbiology department in a children’s hospital. I read to him about healthy eating habits, exercise, preventive medicine, vaccinations and what not. He studies pictures of human anatomy and can clearly distinguish, for example, between cross sections of the larynx and the auditory canal. Very aptly, he had observed that people around him looked apparently healthy. “What’s wrong with me, Mom, that I must pray to be healed? What’s wrong with you? Is Papa sick, too?” He questioned me, needing a truthful answer.

We held his birth hair together and dropped it into the *hundi*. Then we sat down to savor the moment, to relish the great and intense *darshan* we just had and digest the stories and legends that we had heard.

“A sense of ownership, an idea that our body is ‘I’ is the sickness we all have, Mahar,” I whispered. “By offering our hair, we let go of that sense and idea. The offering is our way of saying to Lord Murugan, ‘At your feet, we have let go of our sense of self, we do not claim ownership to our physical be-

ing, appearance and circumstances. Heal us from this sickness of identifying ourselves with our body.’”

He had quietly climbed onto my lap. As I held my child in a loving embrace, a message flashed on my mind’s screen: “We offer a little child’s birth hair at the temple, but think about it, the child is not yet rooted deeply in his sense of self. He is still living in the realm of innocence, instincts, feelings and physiological reflexes that are innate to his biological being. But this rite of passage, *samaskara*, does send a clear message to the mother; it gives her a chance to begin learning to let go.”

After conception and the birth of a child, the very first thing that happens is the snipping of the umbilical cord. Mother and child are two separate beings. The child is born from the mother, and, yet he is distinct and separate from her. The first lesson, therefore, is that a mother must let go of the precious child from her womb. There is no other way. At the *namakarana samskara*, a child gets his own name, and from now on he will be encouraged to leave it behind as a legacy. Soon enough, the sacred time of breast-feeding comes to an end and, with *annaprasana samskara*, the child is given solids to eat and the mother hands her child over to the care of Goddess Annapoorna, the universal mother. Though she will continue to cook for the child, the nourishment will come from the Goddess. Then the child goes through *mundan samskar*—the removal of birth hair. The mother sees that the child no longer wears on himself what he wore in her womb, that is, the birth hair. Mother offers this hair at a temple and prays for the well-being of the child as he grows up and away from her. That is the point of growing up—to grow away! Then comes the *akshar-abhyasa*, introducing the child to reading, writing and math and handing him over to Goddess Saraswati with a prayer, “O Mother,

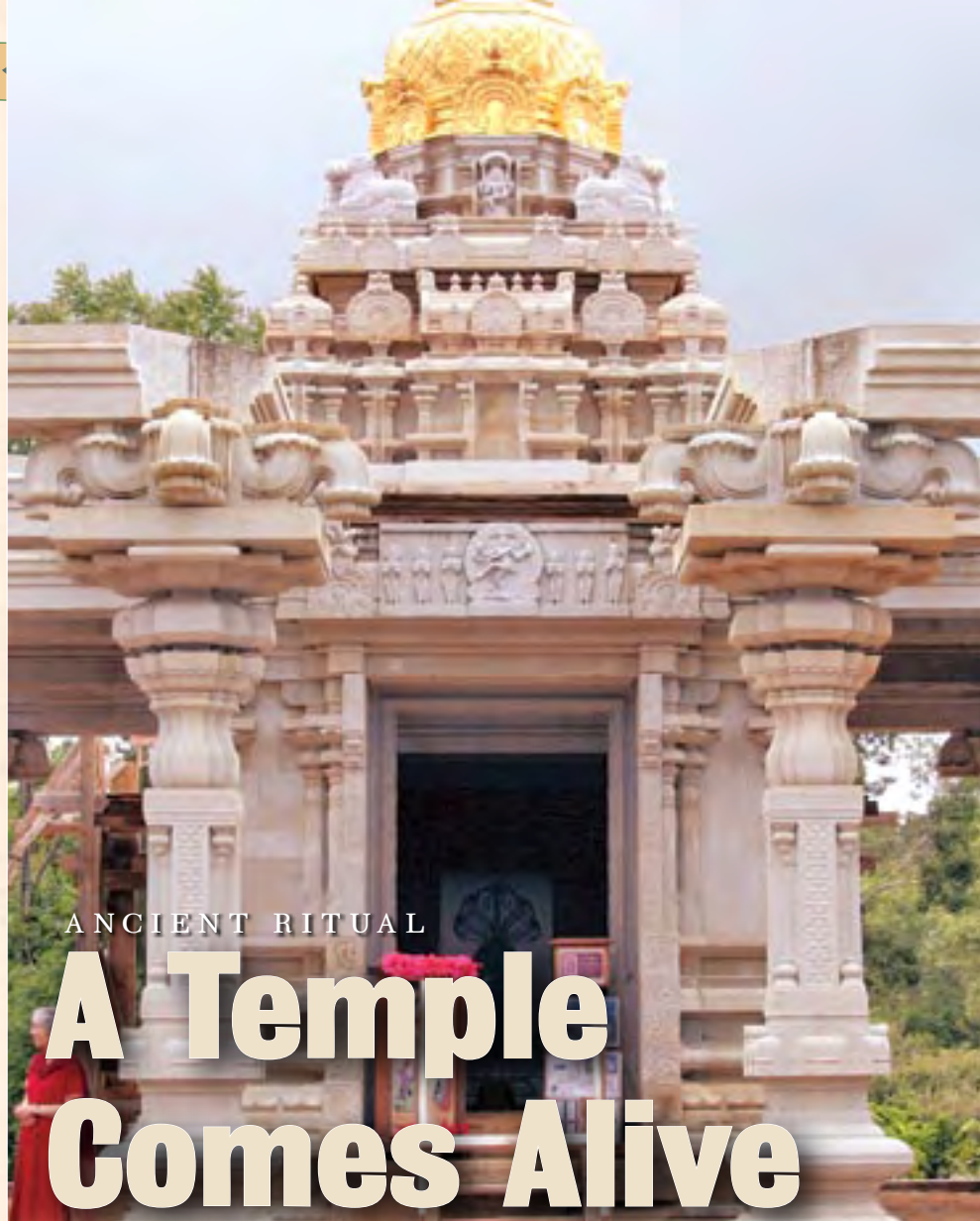
I will teach him to read and write, but you teach him wisdom.”

And so on and so forth. With these discreet steps, the distance between the mother and child keeps growing. These numerous rites of passage mark and celebrate each milestone. Were these rites designed by our great and wise ancestors for impressing upon women that, although they birth and nurture human beings, they must ultimately learn to let their children go? While they continue to be a source of emotional, physical and spiritual comfort for the child, they must learn to set the child free from strictures and unhealthy attachments so that the child may one day give to the world all that he can and is meant to give.

These lessons about letting go can be learned by women without their ever having to renounce the household and join a monastic order. Monasteries are often the playing field of men. Women are given plenty of opportunity to learn to love without owning and to nourish without expecting anything in return. As they raise their children, they are constantly reminded by sacred rites that without love, life is meaningless; without the spiritual strength to let go, love is meaningless. Mahar held me tight, as he does when he can sense that by embracing I am letting him read my mind and heart. Our eyes, both misty and soft, met for a long, long time.

I was overcome with awe and respect for an ancient culture that recognizes essentially nurturing role of women and gives them ample opportunity for tasting renunciation within the framework of rites to be performed in the household, amidst joyous celebration and good food. This is not a culture based on denial. This culture accepts the saying “*Sansaram sagaram*,” “The world is an ocean.” If women are open to seeing the many possibilities that are presented to them for attaining renunciation and wise liberation, while staying truly connected to and rooted in the family, the world—familial and external—becomes an ocean that teaches them how to stay afloat.

Back home in Vermont, we are easing back into our routine—minus the daily opposition from Mahar to my daily puja. Having seen thousands of barefoot pilgrims, all drawn by an ancient statue of Murugan, all praying to be healed, the boy has made peace with my puja routine. He is beginning to learn and recite *shlokas*, and he prays to Ganesh first thing in the morning and before going to bed at night. I could not have brought about these changes in him by showing him pictures of India or talking to him about that country. Did a visit to Lord Murugan in Palani bring about this magic? Did India work her magic on him? We often wonder, and we continue to pray that the magic will be real and lasting.



ANCIENT RITUAL A Temple Comes Alive

The sanctum of Hawaii's all-granite Siva temple is energized by a rare, traditional rite

IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF JULY 21, 2005, a rare ceremony was held for the San Marga Iraivan Temple at Kauai's Hindu Monastery, also home to HINDUISM TODAY's editorial offices. Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati, the temple's chief architect, and Adisaiva priest Kandasamy Gurukkal conducted the *garbhanyasa*, literally “embryo placement.” This ceremony is only done to mark the halfway point in the construction of all-stone temples, so it is rarely performed these days. Ganapati Sthapati has only conducted two others in his 50 years of building.

The *garbhanyasa* ceremony enlivens or divinizes the inner sanctum of the temple for the first time. It is akin to the ceremony done for a mother, around the fifth month

of pregnancy, in which herbal substances are ingested to promote the health and spiritual protection of the baby at the time of the quickening, the baby's first movements in the womb. The objective is similar with the temple, which is regarded as a living being. This ceremony is a crucial moment in the temple's spiritual manifestation. Eighty-one substances, including gold, gems, herbs, roots, various types of soil, grains, medicines, miniature puja articles and symbols of God Siva were placed in a small golden box. The box was then sealed in a niche inside the sanctum, considered the womb. The substances nourish the energy seed that will continue to grow and one day germinate at the temple's final consecration.



ALL PHOTOS: HINDUISM TODAY



Establishing a temple: (Far left) The completed main sanctum and tower of Iraivan Temple. (Clockwise from above) The golden box containing 81 sacred items; priests perform arati for nine kumbhas representing God Siva; the Vedic fire ceremony which began the event; Ganapati Sthapati (left) and assistant architects carefully prepare the box and the niche in the sanctum wall; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami enters the sanctum for the final blessing.



What if Rome's Pagan Religion Had Prevailed?

An persuasive book explores the repercussions of Christianity's ascendancy in ancient times

By TARA KATIR, KAPAA, HAWAII

GOD AGAINST THE GODS: THE HISTORY of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism is the latest from the pen of Jonathan Kirsch, author, journalist and attorney. In this book, Kirsch details the earliest historical conflicts of monotheism and polytheism as they occurred in ancient Europe, North Africa and the Middle East up to the death of Emperor Julian on June 26, 362 CE. His contention is that from its first historical appearance in ancient Egypt, monotheism has been an intolerant belief system. Monotheism's intolerance created conflicts then, and it continues to create conflicts that plague us today. Westerners who take pride in their monotheistic belief's bringing "civilization" to those of polytheistic customs may find Kirsch's analysis sobering and disconcerting.

Over thousands of years, recounts Kirsch, human cultures have worshiped a host of diverse Gods and Goddesses. This polytheistic worship of the Divine, while not totally benign, historically did not create conflict between neighboring peoples. As Symmachus, a pagan governor of the fourth century ce declared, "What does it matter by which wisdom each of us arrives at truth?" (See his entire speech in defense of paganism at www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-10/Npnf2-10-46.htm.) With this flexible posture toward worship of the Divine, little conflict would arise between worshipers of different Gods and Goddesses. Kirsch asserts, "The core value of paganism was religious tolerance—a man or woman was at liberty to offer worship to whatever God or Goddess seemed most likely to grant a prayerful request, with or without the assistance of priests and priestesses." However, in a small geographical area of the Western world an event occurred which presaged a change in humans' personal relationship to the Divine. This development would set in motion what was to become a devastating polarization of enormous proportions—all in the name of divine worship.

In the fourteenth century bce, a young Egyptian pharaoh, Amenhotep IV, through the power of his absolute rule, commanded the Egyptians to worship but one God. This revolutionary move to restrict worship of the Divine to one God would set the stage for what was to become a 3,000 year bloody and acrimonious conflict over how human beings worshiped. "Like Moses [who lived a century later], who is shown in the Christian Bible to condemn the worship of a golden bull and other graven images, Amenhotep rejected all the traditional icons of paganism and chose a simple geometric shape to symbolize the God Aton." Amenhotep repudiated all the Gods and Goddesses in favor of a single God. No idols were fashioned in Aton's image because his was a form that could not be imagined; rather Aton was symbolized by a circle of gold. Amenhotep closed all temples to other deities and had their ritual worship suppressed. Statues were shattered and their names and images literally chiseled off existing monuments. While his radical religious practices were short-lived, the ultraist paradigm shift he initiated would be practiced in the extreme by a legion of believers in this new monotheistic worship.

Monotheism, in its exclusive devotion to the worship of one God, has inspired a ferocity and fanaticism that are mostly absent from polytheism, says Kirsch. He explains, "At the heart of polytheism is an open-minded and easygoing approach to religious belief and practice, a willingness to entertain the idea that there are many Gods and many ways to worship them. At the heart of monotheism, by contrast, is the sure conviction that only a single God exists, a tendency to regard one's own rituals and practices as the only proper way to worship the one true God. The conflict between these two fundamental values is what I call the war of God against the Gods. It is a war that has been fought with heart-shaking cruelty over the last thirty centuries, and is a war that is still being fought today."

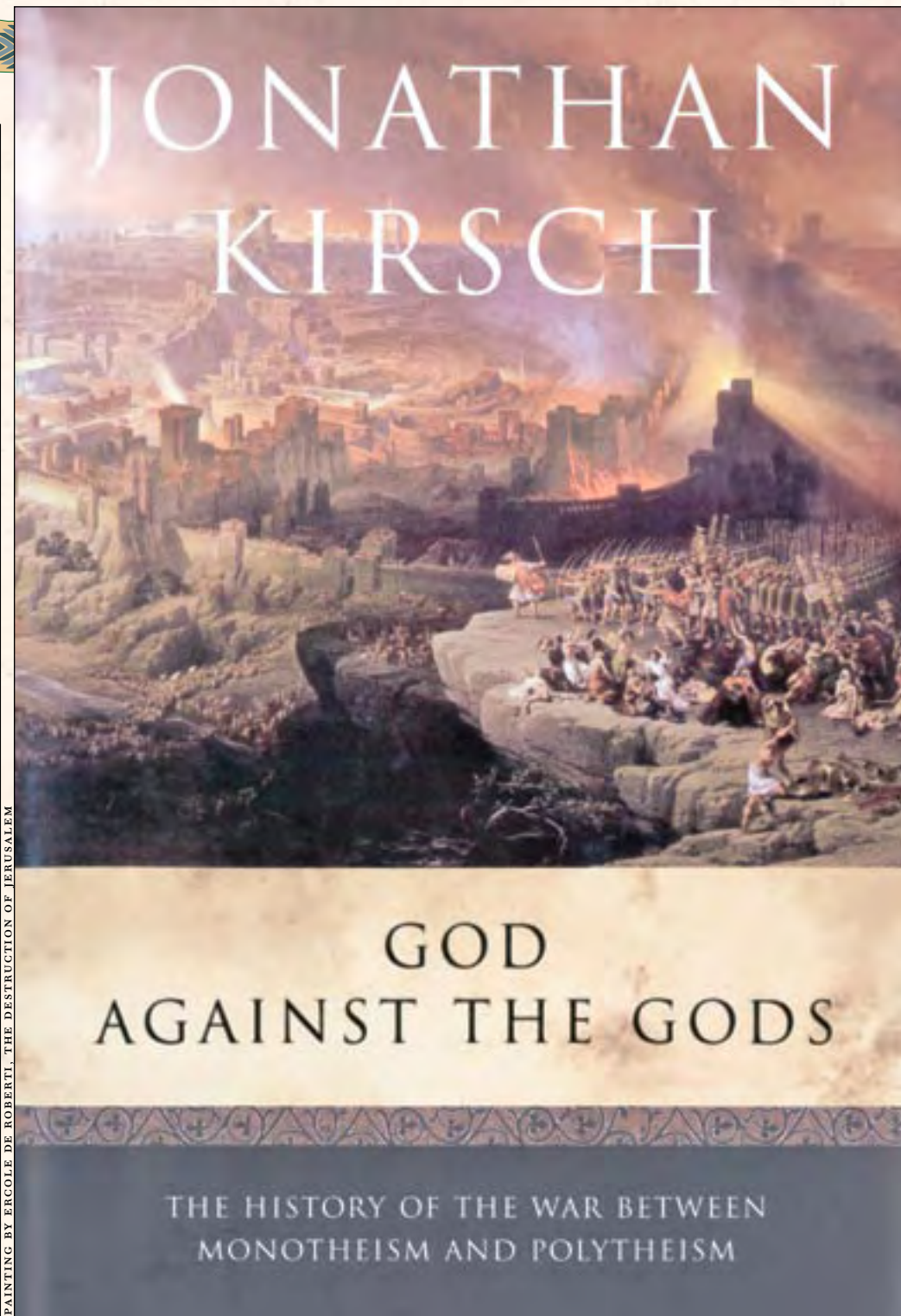
In our world today, Islamic tradition is eas-

ily targeted as the origin of religious terrorism or religious fanaticism. Kirsch points out, that, to the contrary, "It begins in the pages of the Bible, and the very first examples of holy war and martyrdom are found in Jewish and Christian history. The opening skirmishes in the war of God against the Gods took place in distant biblical antiquity, when Yahweh is shown to decree a holy war against anyone who refuses to acknowledge Him as the one and only God worthy of worship." Biblical myth turned to recorded history with the

Maccabean warfare waged against the pagan Syrian king and later, when the Zealots fought against the pagan emperor of Rome.

Kirsch gives readers the derivation of the word *pagan*, which helps us understand how truly acrimonious this warfare was in the past and remains today. Derived from the Latin *paganus*, *pagan* originally meant someone who was a country bumpkin, or a village dweller. The Roman military used *pagan* to denote a civilian as distinguished from a soldier ready to fight. Kirsch explains,

PAINTING BY ERGOLE DE ROBERTI, THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM



The hazards of monotheism: Author Jonathan Kirsch is a popular writer on biblical, literary and legal topics. Other books by him include *Forbidden Tales of the Bible* and *King David: The Real Life of the Man Who Ruled Israel*.

"The Christian rigorists regarded themselves as soldiers, ready to march forth as crusaders in a holy war, and they characterized anyone who refused to take up arms in the service of the Only True God as a civilian, a slacker, a *paganus*."

Kirsch also provides readers with the historical usage definition of the word *atheist*. "Ironically, the word *atheist* was first used by pagans to describe Christians because they denied the very existence of the Gods and Goddesses whom the pagans so revered. What to Christians was an act of conscience, the pagan saw as an act of disloyalty and disrespect. All that was required of them was some simple demonstration of their civic virtue."

This rigorism—extreme strictness in enforcing religious belief and practice—was not always expressed through self-discipline or self-affliction. Kirsch explains that rigorism is possible only when men or women become so convinced of their version of truth that it becomes a matter of life or death. "Turning inward, rigorism may inspire a true believer to punish himself by holding back a bowel movement or feeding himself on raw vegetables [examples from hermits of early Christianity]. Turned outward, however, rigorism may inspire the same man or woman to punish others who fail to embrace the religious beliefs that he or she finds so compelling. Rigorism in one's beliefs and practices can readily turn into the kind of zealotry that expresses itself in unambiguous acts of terrorism. The very first use of the word *zeal* in the Bible is used to describe God's approval of an act of murder, one Israelite murdering another Israelite and his Midianite lover."

In the modern world, rigorism or religious terrorism, inexplicably has been carried out by monotheists against other monotheists—all followers of the Abrahamic religious traditions, Muslims, Jews and Christians. "The worst excesses of the Crusades and the Inquisition were inflicted by Christians on Jews and Muslims, all of whom claimed to believe in the same God. But the first casualties in the war of God against the Gods were found among those tolerant polytheists whom we are taught to call pagans." Rigorists today are found a plenty—Christian fundamentalists who murder physicians who perform abortions, Islamic suicide bombers who murder innocent people in public places, Afghani Taliban extremists who blasted apart the 1,600-year-old Bamiyan Buddhist statues, Catholic and Protestant extremists in Northern Ireland bombing one another—

to name only a few.

Kirsch focuses on the reign of Emperor Julian, the last polytheistic emperor of Rome. Historically called "The Apostate" because of his conversion from Christianity to Paganism, Julian issued a tolerance edict in 362 decreeing the reopening of pagan temples and the restitution of temple properties. This was in stark contrast to his predecessor, Constantine I, who legalized Christianity and suppressed paganism. In the end, monotheism's final triumph at the death of Emperor Julian in battle with a Christian army was not so much a spiritual defeat of polytheism, but rather the political success of monotheism. Kirsch states, "They were both driven as much by grudges and grievances as by true belief, and intimate family politics mattered as much as the wars and conspiracies in which they were engaged." Julian's life was ended by a spear thrust two years into the pagan counterrevolution of his reign. Kirsch and other historians have speculated what our world would be like today if Julian had lived and succeeded in "bringing the spirit of respect and tolerance back into Roman government and thus back into the roots of Western civilization, and even more tantalizing to consider how different our benighted world might have been if he had succeeded."

Once in control, Christianity spread across Europe with a vengeance. Kirsch writes of Christian monks who, in the third century ce, "Urged on by the most militant of the bishops, took it upon themselves to search for and destroy any expression of paganism that they could find. They delighted in pulling down altars, smashing statuary and ruining shrines and temples. They set upon any unfortunate man or woman whom they suspected of engaging in pagan rituals of worship."

At the end of Kirsch's book, I was compelled to conclude that little had been accomplished during this 3,000-year conflict of monotheism versus polytheism, which often segued into political gain. And nothing had been gained by the creative and grim techniques of torture, warfare and missionary zeal—usually masquerading as educational opportunity and social aid—to effect change in those whose worship of the Divine was somehow unacceptable. The monotheistic origins of this proclivity Kirsch outlines; yet what readers may ponder is the appalling ferociousness of the killing—all in the name of God. Ending with a chronology of events, a list of major historical figures, bibliographic notes for each chapter and an extensive bibliography, the book invites readers to research for themselves monotheism's virulent struggle for supremacy over polytheism.

JONATHAN KIRSCH, GOD AGAINST THE GODS—THE HISTORY OF THE WAR BETWEEN MONOTHEISM AND POLYTHEISM, PENGUIN PUTNAM GROUP PUBLISHER, 375 HUDSON STREET, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10014; US\$25.95; 336 PAGES.

Geography Skills

Answers:

1. the Ganges River
2. They moved toward the coast and followed it toward the Deccan Plateau. There would have been more to eat on the coasts, and vegetation was probably lush.

Reading Check

Answer: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaisyas (commoners, usually merchants), Sudras (peasants, artisans, manual laborers); at the lowest level of Indian society, the Untouchables are actually outside the caste system as they are not considered human

Writing Activity

During a class discussion, ask students to explain the caste system and write their descriptions on the chalkboard. Then divide the class into five groups, and assign each group a caste. Members of each caste must write a one-page paper on what it's like to be a member of their caste. Have one volunteer from each group read the brief essay to the class. **Ask:** Is society in the United States organized by social status? What is the main difference between the Indian caste system and American social structure? (Answers will vary, but students should note that in the United States people can move between social classes.)

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC Aryan Migration, 2000–500 B.C.



Geography Skills

The Aryans were nomadic peoples who moved through India. Eventually, they controlled most of India.

1. **Interpreting Maps** What geographical feature enabled the Aryans to end their nomadic lifestyle?
2. **Applying Geography Skills** Examine the pattern of Aryan migration. Why do you think the Aryans followed such a route?

were the Untouchables. The Untouchables probably made up about 5 percent of the total population of ancient India. The Untouchables were given menial, degrading tasks that other Indians would not accept, such as collecting trash and handling dead bodies. They were not considered human, and their very presence was considered harmful to members of the other classes.

Reading Check Summarizing What are the names of the castes in Indian society?

Hinduism

Two of the world's great religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, began in India. Hinduism had its origins in the religious beliefs of the Aryan peoples who settled in India after 1500 B.C. Evidence about the religious beliefs of the Aryan peoples comes from the Vedas, collections of hymns and religious ceremonies that were passed down orally through the centuries by Aryan priests and then eventually written down.

Early Hindus believed in the existence of a single force in the universe, a form of ultimate reality of God, called Brahman. It was the duty of the individual self—called the *atman*—to seek to know this ultimate reality. By doing so, the self would merge with Brahman after death.

By the sixth century B.C., the idea of reincarnation had appeared in Hinduism. Reincarnation is the belief that the individual soul is reborn in a different form after death. After a number of existences in the earthly world, the soul reaches its final goal in a union with Brahman.

Important to this process is the idea of *karma*, the force generated by a person's actions that determines how the person will be reborn in the next life. According to this idea, what people do in their current lives determines what they will be in their next lives. In the same way, a person's current status is not simply an accident. It is a result of the person's actions in a past existence.

The system of reincarnation provided a religious basis for the rigid class divisions in Indian society. It justified the privileges of those on the higher end of the scale. After all, they would not have these privileges if they were not deserving. At the same time, the concept of reincarnation gave hope to those lower on the ladder of life. The poor, for example, could

Hinduism by the book: At left is a page from the teacher's manual for World History Modern Times, a tenth grade textbook from McGraw-Hill/Glencoe publishers. The two columns at right are the student's book, the single column to the left is advice to the teacher. The material suffers from factual errors, bias and a lack of focus on the central religious tenets of Hinduism. At the urging of Hindu parents, the Virginia school board rejected the book.

view of Hinduism and what it stands for, we had to take steps to educate the county officials and create awareness among the Hindus," he explained. Bahadur added, "The books contain factual inaccuracies, distortions, bias, prejudice and personal opinion about Hinduism and the history of India."

Bahadur analyzed the eight textbooks awaiting adoption by the school board. One was a Grade 5 textbook, *World History* (Harcourt Horizons) written by Michael J. Berson and published in 2005. It includes in its section on Hinduism, "Over time, people made up stories to help them better understand the ideas expressed in the Vedas. Later these stories were grouped together in epic poems, such as the *Mahabharata*." Bahadur objected that the epics should be regarded as "made up," when they are regarded by Hindus as factual history. In a recent California dispute over texts, the Jewish community successfully got one book excluded because it referred to the Jewish exodus from Egypt circa 13th century bce in a similar fashion, that this key event in Jewish history may never have happened.

At the same time, Christianity is portrayed in an unjustifiably favorable light. For example, the 10th grade *World History* book (excerpts illustrated on this page) states, "Why was Christianity able to attract so many followers [by the third century ce]? First, the Christian message had much to offer the Roman world. Christianity was personal and offered salvation and eternal life to individuals. Christianity gave meaning and purpose to life." Nowhere does the text mention the bloody armed conflict and political machinations which actually brought about Christianity's spread, as recounted in the book *God against the Gods, The History of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism* (see review on preceding pages).

Alice Reilly, Social Studies K-12 Coordinator for FCPS, said, "As a result of public comment from Hindu parents, our school system sought the advice of scholars in this area." A scholarly panel was brought together to analyze the textbooks and make recommendations as to what further steps the school board could take with regard to the concerns of parents. The committee compared the texts' description of Hinduism with other world religions, according to



Hinduism

Hindus believe that after death the soul leaves the body and is reborn in another person, animal, vegetable, or mineral. Where a soul is reborn depends upon its *karma*, or the accumulated merits or faults of its past lives. One of the ways Hindus increase "good" *karma* is through rituals such as washing away their sins. The Ganges is considered a sacred river to Hindus, and each year thousands come to bathe in the water to purify themselves.

Christianity

Christians believe in one God and that Jesus Christ is the Savior, the Son of God, who was sent to Earth and died on the cross to save humanity. Christians believe that faith in Jesus saves believers from God's penalty for sin and bestows eternal life. The cross remains a very potent symbol of the religion. For Christians, the Bible is the inspired word of God. Christianity began approximately 2,000 years ago. It is practiced by almost 2 billion people in nearly all parts of the world.



Unequal presentations: The description of Hinduism above is both inaccurate and unappealing, while the description of Christianity reads like a Sunday church sermon.

Vijay Kumar, a systems engineering graduate student at The University of Maryland College Park. He is assisting the committee with his expertise in Hindu philosophy and literature. The findings, as summarized by the FCPS, were: 1) the treatment of Hinduism and India emphasizes clichés; 2) there is a focus on material that is not important or illuminating; 3) the treatment of Hinduism is oversimplified and often lacking context; 4) the exotic is often overemphasized while other religions are examined from the perspective of followers; and 5) the material does not adequately present the fundamental belief systems of the religion. Experiences with "scholarly panels" in other areas have been mixed, as these scholars are often themselves the source of misinformation on Hinduism.

Kumar said, "Everything in the books leads back to caste as a central concept. For example, many textbooks say reincarnation justifies *karma* which justifies caste." He added that most textbooks also cover the Aryan migration and reincarnation; some cover *karma*, the Vedas and Vishnu or Siva worship as a facet of modern Hinduism.

Kumar gives the example of "cow worship," which is a common subject for the Hindu section. "Ask a Hindu school child about cow worship and you will most likely receive a puzzled look and the response, 'I don't go home and worship a cow,'" Kumar said. "Of all the textbooks we reviewed, only one mentions the concept of *moksha* [release

from the on-going cycle of rebirth] but does not attach the notion of salvation to it." But in the sections on other religions, Kumar observed, the means to salvation is presented quite clearly. In the case of the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—salvation is expressed in terms of a permanent state of eternal life in heaven. The Hindu concept is somewhat different, but the idea is still that there is a higher form of existence to be attained by means of the religious life. Unfortunately, this is not conveyed by the texts, leaving the impression that Hinduism does not offer a means of salvation.

FCPS decided to drop only one book after the scholarly committee's review, as a result of "stiff opposition from parents," said Bahadur. That is *World History Modern Time*. The committee recommended additional teacher training for social studies teachers, supplementary material on Hinduism, buying of books only after corrections and teaching 5th grade students about Hindu daily worship and the Holi and Deepavali festival.

Venkataraman said that the Hindu communities in Fairfax County plan to keep up their work until their children can come home and say that writing on their tests that "Hindus believe in only one Supreme God" is marked as "correct" by their teacher. He concluded, "Until the above objective is realized, we will remain engaged and help the school board adopt books and other educational materials which are free from distortions and prejudice."

EDUCATION

Textbooks Get It Wrong

Abysmal presentation of Hinduism stirs a parental revolt in Virginia

BY AMBIKA BEHAL, WASHINGTON, D.C.

DR. RAKESH BAHADUR, WHOSE children are in the Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) system in northern Virginia, told HINDUISM TODAY, "One day my daughter came home and said, 'Daddy, what you teach us about Hinduism is wrong, since the description of Hinduism in my textbook is different.'"

Bahadur (bahadur@comcast.net) had just experienced firsthand what many Hin-

du parents have discovered: textbooks and teachers across the United States are woefully ill-equipped to provide an accurate view of Hinduism. Our 5,000-year-old Hindu culture is being summarized in a mere page or two, as part of a few classes. But now there are efforts underway in several parts of the country, including Virginia, Texas and California, to bring changes to the teaching of Hinduism in public schools. Bahadur's experience is typical of these efforts. His peti-

tion, signed by 200 local residents, brought the Hindu complaints to the FCPS board. "Our concern is that incorrect books distort the minds of the young Hindu children. Also, these books make them feel embarrassed about their religion because their fellow students are getting a distorted view of Hinduism," said Vittal Venkataraman, one of the parents working alongside Bahadur. "When we found out the books used at the school presented a conflicting and biased

A Million-Dollar Vegan Vision

A retired Silicon Valley entrepreneur puts a fortune on the line to bring a master chef's compassionate cuisine to mainstream USA

BY MARK HAWTHORNE, CALIFORNIA
CHAPTER ONE OF A NEW VEGAN COOKBOOK begins, "Aloha and welcome to a transformation journey into new realms of culinary creation. *Vegan World Fusion Cuisine* is a peaceful and loving approach to food preparation that unites cooking traditions from around the world.

It may sound like a New Age pipe dream, but it's not. Angel investor Bo Rinaldi is a serious business force. Once a renowned talent agent in Silicon Valley, he negotiated contracts for over a thousand software engineers who helped develop products for Apple, Adobe, ETrade, Netflix and more. Previously, as a VP of Marketing, he helped ComputerLand grow from 30 to over 500 stores. Before computers, in the sixties, Bo was a young herbalist in Southern California. His products from those days are still on the market.

In 1999 he sold the software agency and immersed himself in yoga and sadhana for six years, striving to get back to his roots. He says an inner message drew him to Kauai, and when he had the "Radical Mystery Meal" at the Blossoming Lotus Cafe, it struck a chord. Bo recognized a unique spirit behind the restaurant's vegan team. Within a week, Rinaldi, a committed vegan, became the restaurant's main investor. As of 2006, he has put in over a million dollars into a new, full-blown Blossoming Lotus Restaurant (often called simply "Lotus"), the www.VeganFusion.com website and the delightful *Vegan World Fusion Cuisine* cookbook.

Behind the creative, vegan fusion cuisine is Mark Reinfeld, a master executive vegan chef from New York who came to Kauai for spiritual retreat in 2002. He decided to help Gabriel Zingaro transform a small Internet Cafe called The Portal into an all-vegan business. Two days after the new cafe opened, Bo Rinaldi and his wife, Starr, walked in and recognized the potential of Reinfeld's and Zingaro's vision. Everyone's lives changed in a big way. It was time to take the message to the world.

Rinaldi, Reinfeld, Zingaro and the others of the 12-member Blossoming Lotus LLC are passionate about their *seva*. They even called upon the monks from Kauai's Hindu

Monastery, home of HINDUISM TODAY, to bless the restaurant's opening in 2004. "I characterize our work at the Blossoming Lotus as a spiritually transformative process," says Rinaldi. "The business is characterized as the best of everything we can possibly find from the vegan world. People come in because they understand that food is transformational, that it's healing. We try to lay down the most unbelievable meals on the planet." They do this with considerable care, making everything by hand, right down to the condiments. "Our chai as well as our bread are handcrafted here at our restaurants," he says. "It's an evolving process, and it's working."

Lotus was recently named the number-one vegetarian restaurant in Hawaii and is the state's first Certified Green Restaurant. Their award-winning cookbook is getting rave reviews. In addition to the Hawaii restaurant, they have opened a Blossoming Lotus Cafe in the Yoga in the Pearl studio in Portland, Oregon, and are planning a robust franchise program.

Chef Mark Reinfeld has created hundreds of tried and tested recipes. He says the Lotus is special because of "the acknowledgment that all food is sacred, giving thanks for preparing, serving and enjoying the abundance of the Earth. World fusion cuisine unites the culinary traditions from around the world to emphasize our unity. We hold an intention for healing and love, and this vibration enters into the food. Sensitive people notice this without a doubt. The names of the recipes are selected to further impart this healing vibration, so simply mentioning the names of the recipes brings a blessing: Mahadev's mango chutney, Bliss of Krishna tropical rice pudding, Shiva Shakti Himalayan stuffed bread."

Of course, it also helps to have the finest ingredients. In acquiring these, the Lotus supports more than a dozen local organic farmers, orders whole grains from natural-food manufacturers and buys fruits and vegetables from the farmer's markets. Being 100 percent vegan, the restaurant serves nothing that comes from an animal or insect (such as honey). You will have to leave your goat cheese at the door, but you will be delighted with the Lotus' amazing "Live Almond Milk Cheeze."



STARR RINALDI

Award Winning Cookbook: The commitment to sharing the ideals of nonviolence with those who may not be able to visit Hawaii led Reinfeld and Rinaldi to collaborate on the absolutely gorgeous and must-have-in-your-kitchen *Vegan World Fusion Cuisine* cookbook. It is a celebration of sustainable living intended to nourish the soul as well as the body. With its delicious recipes, luscious photographs and words of wisdom, this book looks as natural on the coffee table as it does in the kitchen. All the recipes from the book were created at the Blossoming Lotus. Like the restaurant, they reflect the culinary styles of a many nations, including India, Mexico, Thailand, France, Italy and Greece—"Hindi's Bindi Masala," "Domo Arigato Heavenly Arame Salad," "Mother Africa's Spicy Kale and Yam"—what executive chef Reinfeld calls "world fusion cuisine."

"The book's message is very clear," says Rinaldi. "The way to get off of our pharmaceuticals, to get off of factory farming, to get off of our highly processed food system—to really reclaim our lives—is go to your farmer's market and make a few recipes out of the book. We'll do anything to help you understand that this is one of the most effective ways to bring peace to life. It's easy, it's fun, it's inexpensive, and most of all, it's rewarding on every level. That's what it's about for us."

The Founders: After graduating from college and going to law school in New York, Reinfeld traveled the world on a spiritual odyssey. From Europe in 1989 he went to Israel and India. "It was during that journey that my focus started shifting inward. On the Kibbutz one day I was asked to collect chickens for slaughter. I started helping out and suddenly realized I wanted no part of it. That's when there was a real change in my diet. It was the beginning of a period of deep self-reflection." Traveling through India and Nepal "opened up another part of my being," he says. After such experiences, studying law just didn't hold the same in-



DAWN JEWELL

Angel Investor, Culinary Master and Vegan Wonder Food: (left) Bo Rinaldi in his study in Oregon and (above) Mark Reinfeld outside the Lotus on Kauai; (below) Super Shakti's Spanikopita casserole; the ingredients behind the food. Prices run to \$50.00 for a handcrafted entree, plus side dishes, but \$9.00 also gets you a hearty meal—"The Monk's Bowl."



AMY ARCHBOLD



AMY ARCHBOLD

terest. Soon after returning to New York, Reinfeld started a vegan consulting service called the Blossoming Lotus. A string of successful commissions followed, including creating a menu for the luxury spa at the Peninsula Hotel in Manhattan and a vegan manual for the Credit Suisse First Boston, one of the world's largest financial institutions. But his spiritual quest led him to discard life in the Big Apple, give up most of his possessions and travel to California. He eventually settled on Kauai and gave Blossoming Lotus new wings, feeding people as karma yoga.

Bo Rinaldi was born in 1948, the year of Gandhi's *mahasamadhi*. "I read my first Gandhi biography at 12," he says. "I saw and felt to my core the meaning of nonviolence, and how challenging it is to manifest in our culture. I began to see the need to speak out, which I did at school, the YMCA—anywhere people would listen. I still find myself drawing upon ancient Hindu wisdom as a beacon of sanity. I became an herbalist and developed health food products before going into the computer world."

After major financial success, Bo retired from software development in 1999. "When I was able to decompress, I turned within a lot more," he says. "I married, and my wife had some health challenges. We found that when we adopted a vegan lifestyle, those health challenges were minimized. I had lost track of what was going on in the natural foods world, because I had been in tech for 15 years, but I found that there was now much more science to support the vegan lifestyle. As I applied this to help my wife's healing, I once again realized we're really onto something here. If we could greatly reduce our use of animal products, we could actually solve the world's hunger problem and bring true peace to the planet. And things started to click."

The vegan fusion initiative is an innovative model for modern karma yoga, showing us how people can put their fortunes and their lives to work for a higher cause.

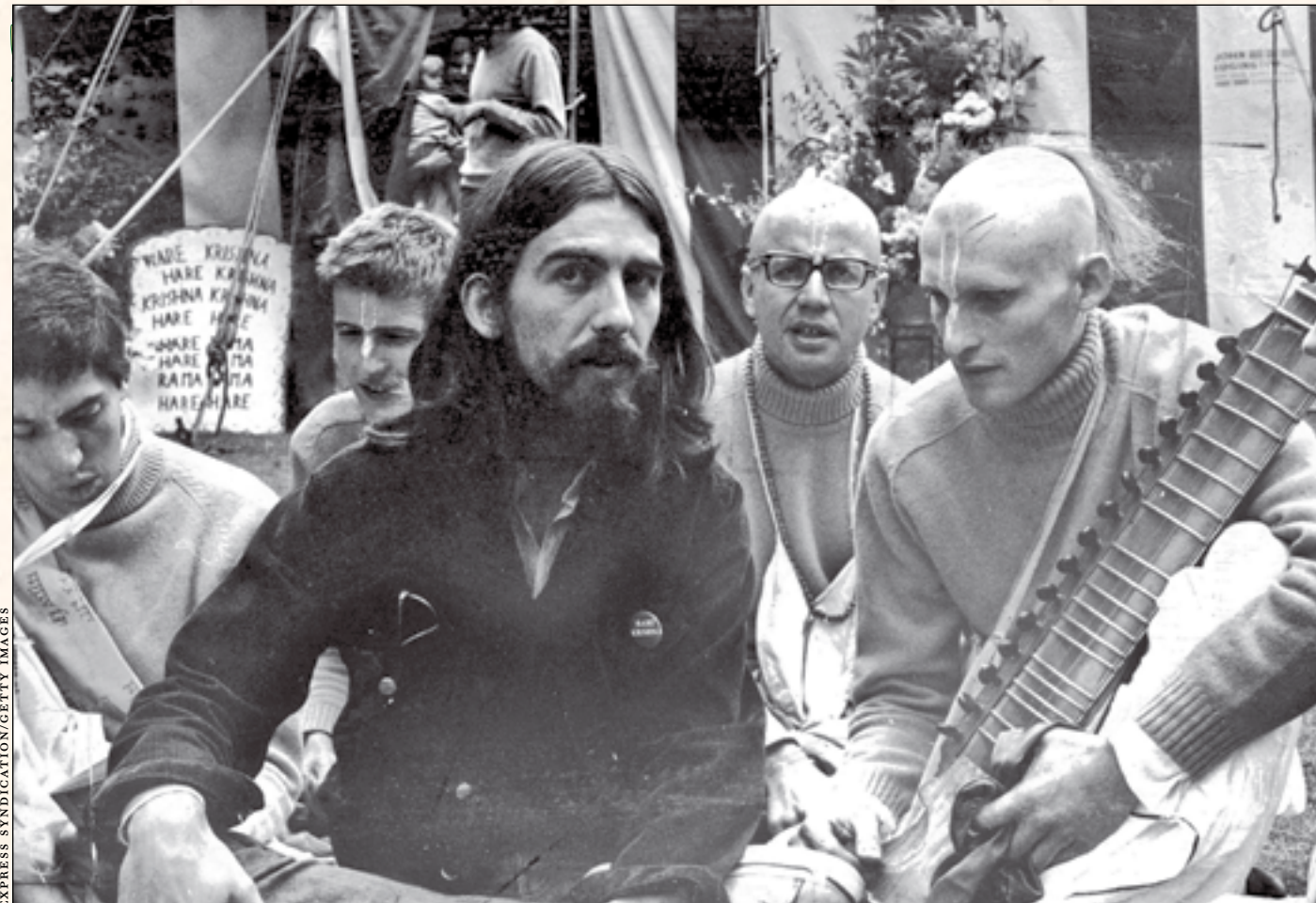
Visit www.blossominglotus.com or contact Bo Rinaldi at bo@onedegree.com.



AMY ARCHBOLD

Carpe Diem Carrot Almond Pate Nori Rolls: Almonds, carrots, lemon juice, ginger, turmeric, shoyu and a touch of salt and pepper blended together into a pate, rolled with assorted veggies into Nori seaweed sheets and graced with green decorations

Through conscious and wise food choices we can heal our bodies and restore balance to our planet. By honoring the cuisine, art music and spiritual traditions of the world's cultures we cultivate understanding and peace." Spawned from the small Blossoming Lotus restaurant on Kauai, Hawaii, it is a fresh incarnation for ahimsa, the seed of a new enterprise initiative to spread the vegan message to the world.



Chanting the Divine Name: *Former Beatles singer and guitarist George Harrison sits with members of the Hare Krishna sect, August, 1969*

BIOGRAPHY

George Harrison's Spiritual Life

The Beatles went from super stardom to India, Swami Vivekandanda, Paramahansa Yogananda, Maharishi's TM and Lord Krishna

BY JOSHUA M. GREENE, NEW YORK

IN 1966, GEORGE HARRISON, LEAD GUITARIST of the most popular rock group ever, the Beatles, said, "The people of India have a tremendous spiritual strength which I don't think is found elsewhere. The spirit of the people, the beauty, the goodness—that's what I've been trying to learn about."

In 1969, devotees from the London Radha Krishna temple invited me to take part in an album of mantras and prayers that George Harrison was producing at Apple Studios. Meeting him for the first time, I was struck by his humility, by his understated humor, and by his excitement over the music we had gathered to make. Recording these ancient songs was his way of letting people know “there’s more to life than boogying,” as he put it. At that time, the Beatles were dissolving, but George’s solo career was grow-

ing, thanks in large measure to his daily meditations and yoga practice.

It may be difficult for someone who didn't grow up in the sixties to understand the significance of a Beatle's committing to India's spiritual teachings. A large percentage of baby boomers, as the generation born after World War II were called, took their cues about beliefs, behavior and politics, as well as wardrobe and hairstyle, from what the Beatles did and sang. If Americans had any impression of Hinduism at all, it was usually distorted by British missionary prejudice. By publicly declaring his appreciation for yoga, meditation, karma, dharma, reincarnation and other concepts identified with India, George helped reverse nearly three hundred years of anti-Hindu ignorance and bias.

There was a trajectory to George's spiritual life, which began and ended with mu-

sic. In 1966, he met maestro Ravi Shankar and thrilled to the sound of a sitar, to the lull of its sympathetic strings and the way it could stretch a single note to imitate the yearning of a heart in love. Later that year, George continued his sitar lessons in Srinagar, an extended village at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains surrounded by fields of golden saffron flowers. In this idyllic setting he practiced music and spent hours reading about India's ancient teachings. As a boy, George had been an indifferent student, but during that visit he was rarely without a book in his hands, including Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* and Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

What he learned of India's spiritual culture amazed him. Unlike institutional religions that barely tolerate one another, here was a world view that encompassed ev-

everyone and everything. All living beings are eternal souls, part and parcel of God, the texts declared. Our job is to manifest that divinity. This, the Hindu tradition said, is Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion, which dwells in all beings. "Through Hinduism I feel a better person," he told a reporter. "I just get happier and happier."

John, Paul and Ringo were his closest friends, and in 1968 he induced his fellow Beatles and their partners to join him and his then wife, model Patty Boyd, on a retreat to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's ashram in Rishikesh. The Beatles' days in Rishikesh consisted of a casual breakfast, morning meditation classes until lunch, leisure time in the afternoons, and sometimes as many as three more hours of meditation in the evenings. George and his friends found their creative energies heightened in the peaceful atmosphere of the retreat. In Rishikesh, the Beatles composed more than forty songs. Many were recorded on the *White Album*, and others would appear on their final LP, *Abbey Road*. They all appreciated their time in India, but it was George who took away a lasting impression that this was his real life's work, to go deeper into India's millennial teachings and realize his eternal relationship with the Divine.

Returning to London, he met disciples of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder-acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. George identified with the American devotees, young people his own age, who had rejected materialism for higher ground. In their company, George began to chant the Hare Krishna mantra daily and to read the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Signs of George's devotion to yoga and meditation filled his home. Incense sweetened the air. A small altar sat on the mantle of the fireplace. Pictures of favorite teachers and paintings of Deities from India's scriptures decorated the walls: Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune; elephant-headed Ganesh; Krishna playing with his friends in the cowherd village of Vrindavan. George found Indian theology exciting and sensual, filled with meditative music, tasty food, fabulous stories of eternal worlds, and all the satisfactions a newcomer to the spiritual journey could ever hope to find.

Producing records with spiritual messages provided an ideal way for him to make use of his musical skills and his influence with the record industry. In 1970, he released "My Sweet Lord," inspired by the Edwin Hawkins Singers' "Oh Happy Day," a gospel classic that featured a chorus repeating the



The early seekers: Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in Rishikesh, 1968, with John Lennon and Paul McCartney to his right and George Harrison, actress Mia Farrow and folk-singer Donovan to his left

song's title over and over. George wrote a choral line using the word "Hallelujah" as the refrain, and then switched mid-way to the phrase "Hare Krishna."

George's spiritual journey was not an easy one. His wife Patty left him, in large measure because his commitment to God grew stronger than his commitment to their partnership. Fans derided him for taking his faith onstage and exhorting them to "Chant Krishna! Jesus! Buddha!" when it was rock and roll they wanted. The press was occasionally cruel in its judgment of his post-Beatles music. And for a while, some bad habits from his rocker days—in particular alcohol and drugs—returned to haunt him.

On visits to Los Angeles, George spent time at the Self-Realization Fellowship estate in Encinitas, overlooking the Pacific Ocean and only three miles from Ravi Shankar's home. Ravi had met SRF founder Yogananda in the 1930s and had given his first US concert at the Encinitas retreat in 1957. The organization strictly honored its members' privacy, a privilege George appreciated after the notoriety of his affiliation with Krishna devotees. The quiet ambience of the Encinitas estate and the organization's focus on achieving heightened awareness through Kriya Yoga had a calming effect.

In later years, George retreated from his pop celebrity into the life of a humble gardener. He took great pleasure in tilling the earth, in planting jasmine bushes, in freeing a magnolia tree from wild brambles, and bringing his neglected Friar Park grounds back to a state of beauty.

In April 1996, he flew to Madras, South

India, to record an album of traditional Indian songs and mantras with Ravi Shankar. George considered "Chants of India" one of his most important works, as it allowed listeners to "listen to something that has its roots in the transcendental ... beyond intellect. If you let yourself be free ... it can have a positive effect."

George never stopped making music or trying to send a spiritual message out into the world. But these callings seemed less urgent to him in his later years than they had as a young man. He once described himself as someone who had climbed to the top of the material world, then looked over to find that there was much more on the other side. There, on the other side of the material mountain, was the call of his eternal self and his relationship with the Divine.

George's life started in music and ended in music. In Los Angeles, surrounded by family and friends and the chanting of God's holy names, his soul left its body on November 29, 2001.

His son Dhani said, “You know, I read a letter from him to his mother that he wrote when he was twenty-four. He was on tour or someplace when he wrote it. It basically says, ‘I want to be self-realized. I want to find God. I’m not interested in material things, this world, fame—I’m going for the real goal. And I hope you don’t worry about me, mum.’ He wrote that when he was twenty-four! And that was basically the philosophy that he had up until the day he died.”

JOSHUA M. GREENE IS AN AUTHOR, FILMMAKER AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT SPECIALIZING IN ISSUES OF FAITH. THIS ARTICLE IS DRAWN FROM HIS NEW BOOK, *HERE COMES THE SUN: THE SPIRITUAL AND MUSICAL JOURNEY OF GEORGE HARRISON*, WWW.HERECOMESTHE SUNBOOK.COM

Discovering the Magic of Muktinath

The physical hardship of a pilgrimage magnifies its life-changing, spiritual effect

BY HARI BANSI JHA, KATMANDU, NEPAL

JUST ONE DAY BEFORE I DEPARTED on pilgrimage to Muktinath, a pious friend of mine dropped by my home in Kathmandu for a casual visit. When he came to know of my impending expedition, he lit up like a light. Suddenly, he couldn't stop talking. "According to legend," he exclaimed, "the sins of a man planning any serious pilgrimage to a holy place become clutched with fear and run for high ground to hide in his hair. This is why so many pilgrims shave their heads before going on pilgrimage."

Even as my rational mind was picking over this allegorical statement for philosophical loopholes, my friend was continuing his inspired proclamation. "To further guarantee the eradication of their sins," he said, "these serious pilgrims practice disciplines like chanting the Lord's name, meditating on His presence, associating with holy people along the way, practicing charity and walking rather than riding, as much as possible. Is this your plan? Will you be doing all these things?"

"I certainly intend for this to be my finest pilgrimage ever," I stammered, feeling almost defensive. At the very least, I was now in a proper mood for Muktinath and all of the spiritual adventures it might have in store for me.

Muktinath is to Hindus and Tibetan Buddhists what Mecca is to Muslims and Jerusalem is to Christians. *Mukti* means "liberation," and *nath* means "Lord." Thus, Muktinath literally means "the Lord of Liberation." Several Hindu scriptures mention Muktinath, especially the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Puranas*. A pilgrim approaching the 96 square miles of Muktinath, also referred to as Mukti Kshetra and Shaligram Kshetra by pilgrims, feels a palpable divinity that invites an ultimate merging with God.

I set out for Muktinath on October 30, 2004, traveling the first part of the journey by plane to avoid the frequent roadblocks set up as a result of Nepal's on-going insurgency. On the flight coming into Jomsom, a small township which is some 25 or 30 mountain-

ous miles from Muktinath, the aircraft I was on flew so dangerously close to the jagged mountain ranges that, at least on one occasion, I instinctively clutched the arm rests of my chair, dead sure that if this wasn't my finest pilgrimage, it would certainly be my

By noon I had been on the move for nearly five hours and was growing quite tired. The journey thus far had been mostly uphill and the heat was becoming oppressive. I had been pushing myself like a soldier, and this willful approach was beginning to wear a little thin. Ripe for a change of perspective, I suddenly remembered something Ramana Maharishi once said. "In approaching a temple or a holy place," he had explained, "one should walk slowly, like a pregnant woman." This made a lot of sense to me right at that time. Suddenly, I found myself chanting the Lord's name and thoroughly enjoying an unhurried ramble toward a destination which was beginning to feel more like it was within, rather than ahead.

As I was about to reach the Muktinath temple, I recalled something else I had been told by a bare-footed, half-naked, dread-locked Indian ascetic I had met at this same place some ten years ago when fate had thrown the two of us together on a pilgrimage. At one point, he turned to me and said, "Coming from a foreign land, even a King must face certain hardships." Truly, God's wisdom shines everywhere.

In addition to the image of Lord Muktinath, devotees coming to the Muktinath temple worship a simple black, glossy stone known as a Shaligram. Representing Lord Vishnu to the Hindus and Buddha to the Buddhists, this Shaligram, which bears a 400-million-year-old life history and can only be found in the Krishna Gandaki river, was named after a holy man known as Shalankayan Rishi who attained enlightenment under a tree in Muktinath during Vedic times. Today in honor of this legend, the 96 square miles surrounding Muktinath is referred to as Shaligram Kshetra.

Nothing can express the joy I felt when my eyes first fell upon the beautiful pagoda-style temple of Muktinath just before sunset. I was 13,000 feet above sea level, and felt like I was in some other world. I even forgot that I was tired. "How long have people been coming here to worship?" I mentally asked myself. No one knows.



The destination: The famed temple of Muktinatha at 13,000 feet above sea level; prayer flags flapping in the wind

last. Following a remarkably graceful landing at about 7:30 in the morning, I most happily prepared to take up the last portion of my journey on foot.

By 8 o'clock, I was walking with vigorous determination toward Muktinath. I met a number of wonderful foreigners along the way. Because tourist season in this part of the world lasts from the beginning of October to the end of November, there were not many locals on the trails at this time, as they avoid outsiders.



THOMAS KELLY

A Queen named Subarn Prabha reconstructed the temple that is here in 1826, but the image of Lord Muktinath, made of copper, is believed to have been there since the 16th century. And the Shaligram upon which the deity is installed has been there much longer than that.

After worshipping Lord Muktinath, I paid homage to Jwalamukhi, the "ever-burning flame," located in the same temple complex. The existence of this flame is said to be supernatural. I could certainly see no apparent cause for it nor indications that it had been tended or nurtured by devotees. According to one legend it was the result of a penance performed by Lord Brahma invoking fire on water.

Night fell with a chilling cold. After looking long and hard for a place to sleep close to the temple complex, I finally found a rather expensive hotel which was more costly because it was supplied with goods airlifted in from outside. I was happy to pay the extra money for the heat alone. When the sun sets in this part of the world—even during the warmest part of the year—heat is a valuable commodity. Happily, while that night was freezing cold, I remained warm.

It was almost noon the next day

when I stopped for lunch at a hotel in Kagbeni on my way home. Kagbeni is a charming town filled with people who come to perform *shraddha* (ancestor worship). Local residents contend that there is no place on the Earth as sacred as Kagbeni for honoring the ancestors.

As I left Kagbeni for Jomsom in the afternoon, the wind along the Gandaki River was blowing at its peak. Although this part of Nepal is notorious for fierce winds, this was just about as bad as it gets. When the government established a wind power plant here about ten years ago to produce electricity, the project was abandoned when the plant itself blew away.

As I walked, the wind was so strong I had to apply the full weight of my body into it just to move ahead, even slowly. I was constantly holding my face in my hands to guard against the piercing sand that was biting every square inch of my exposed skin. When I reached Jomsom in the late afternoon, I was relieved at first. Then I thought: "Oh dear! Time to get back on that plane." Consoling myself with the thought that the blessings I had received from Lord Muktinath would always be with me even if I perished in flight, I promised myself that, if I lived to tell this tale, I would. And so I did.

On the road in and up: The austere Bonpo village of Lubra is situated in the Kali Gandaki region of Western Nepal en route to Muktinath. Its residents follow the Bon tradition of worship, which is older than Buddhism and believed by some to be the original religion of the Tibetan people. Though followers of Bon are a minority, they continue to flourish.



Rock solid divinity: Saligrams, like the one in the Muktinath temple and those shown above, are 400-million-year-old fossilized ammonites characterized by what appear to be discus marks. These marks are revered by Hindus as auspicious indications of Lord Vishnu, who carries a discus. Saligrams are found only in one river of Nepal. It is said that worship of the Saligram requires no special initiation and guarantees spiritual emancipation.

Google Unleashes Stunning Satellite Images to the World

IN OCTOBER, 2004, GOOGLE ACQUIRED THE Keyhole Corporation, which has offered, since 2001, a \$69 program to download and view satellite images. It wasn't big news until the summer of 2005, when Google announced that it would offer a new version called Google Earth—for free! Suddenly millions the world over were able to soar over Mother Earth, zoom down on Zanzibar, hover over the swimming pool of their neighbor's house in Rio de Janeiro, count the cars on the street parked next to the Kremlin in Moscow or fly like a stratospheric bird over the Himalayas.

The “wow” factor of Google Earth is off the charts and will certainly change the way the next generation thinks about the world. There it is, right in front of you, one world, one family, on screen.

What you can see: During the cold war,

between 1963 and 1967, the US Corona series KH (Keyhole) spy satellites brought home hundreds of thousands of hi-resolution images that were declassified in 1996. Hence the name, “Keyhole.” But only a small percentage of KH hi-res images comprise Google Earth's patchwork of images from different satellites using different technologies. A large percentage is from older, lower resolution Earthsat environmental studies images and more recent sources. Any given view may be a composite of several images, some 30 years old. So, lower your expectations if you are looking for real-time and universal super resolution. You get hi-res in San Francisco, but won't find anything like it for Angkor

Wat in Cambodia. And, as you would expect, views are all from the top, and the 3D views are rendered, not real images.

Google-powered: Google brings unprecedented tools for educators, researchers, travelers, students and business. Create, save and e-mail placemarks and tours, and follow intricate tours already prepared by others. For a price you can get GPS device support, drawing tools and better printing. For sheer mind-expanding fun, this blogger, Kanaka Ravi Kumar, says it well: “I'd like to congratulate all technicians behind this awesome creation. I'm very much thankful to them. Opening this site is an odyssey, a never-ending adventure.”

earth.google.com



Left, the Venkateshwara Temple of Tirumala, India; above, Earth from over India



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A vertical strip of 15 decorative scrollwork borders. Each border consists of a central rectangular frame with ornate, swirling patterns on the sides and top. The colors are primarily orange, purple, and brown. The patterns are symmetrical and intricate, resembling traditional East Asian scrollwork. The borders are arranged in a vertical column, with each one slightly offset from the one below it.

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Standing left to right are the stewards; Paramacharya Palaniswami, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Paramacharya Ceyonswami and Sannyasin Saravananathaswami. Seated is the HHE staff: Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami, charitable funds manager, and Sadhaka Jivanandanatha, charitable funds accountant.

Standing left to right are the stewards; Paramacharya Palaniswami, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Paramacharya Ceyonswami and Sanmyasin Saravananathaswami. Seated is the HHE staff: Sanmyasin Shanmuganathaswami, charitable funds manager, and Sadhaka Jivanandanatha, charitable funds accountant.

JULY TO SEPTEMBER

ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment

AnonymousUS\$753.75

David Joseph Ebacher7.00

Ajay & Lata Shah5,000.00

Other Donations31,744.33

Total37,505.08

Iraivan Temple Endowment

Norman C. Carr10.00

Ishwar & Alka Datta106.50

Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam5.00

Ramu Gowindasami3,137.25

Mohan Rao Korukonda108.00

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S.V. Ravi Rahavenderan906.00

Sara K. Sivasuri109.63

Raja Vishnu5.00

Other Donations21,218.94

Total25,914.32

Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund

Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam352.10

Tarakini Gunasegaram3.30

Trumayun Gunasegaram2.50

Thanesw Kumar Kumarevel158.74

Saroja Devi Manickam6.00

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Devaladevi Sivaceyon2.67

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Kantha Ruben Sivalingam0.80

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Potriyan Sivanathan10.75

Girish Skanda26.00

Jayema Skanda8.36

Subawese Skanda25.00

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Total Endowment Funds\$6,688,539.58

Total Pooled Income Funds\$202,277.69

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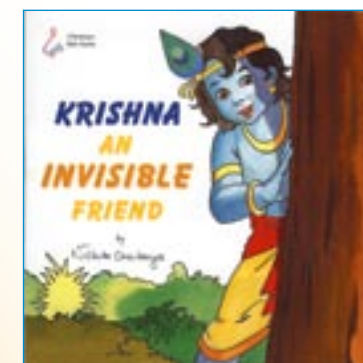
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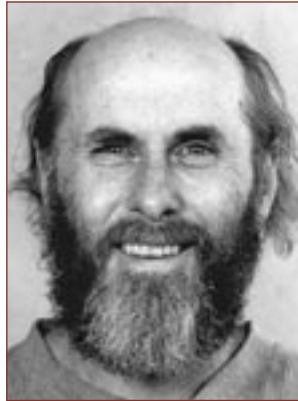
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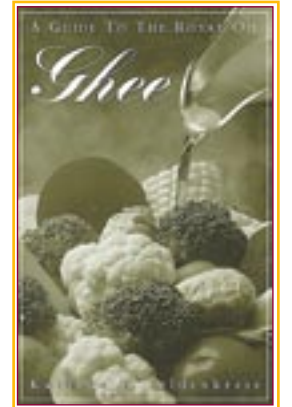


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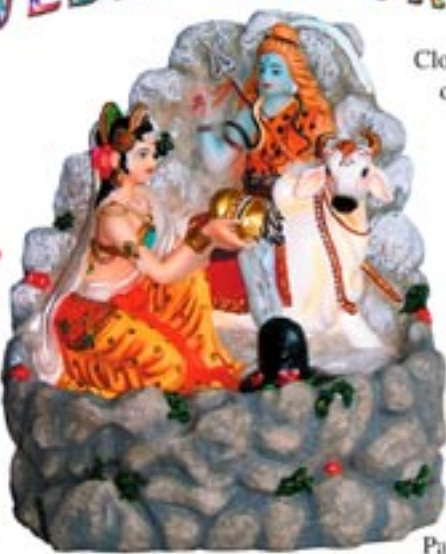
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00:00	ISCKON*	08:00	Swami Ramdevji-Yoga *	17:00	Rahmas Sahib-Gurbani
00:20	Bhajanavali-Devotional songs	09:00	Aasa Di Ji War Sahib-Gurbani*	18:00	Satyanaarayan Goenkaji-Vipassana
00:30	Rameshshai Oza-Discourses *	10:00	Jagadguru Kripakaji-Discourses *	18:20	Swarnajali-Devotional songs
00:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	10:20	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	18:30	Narayan Seva Sansthan-Gyan Ganga
01:00	Ek Namdevji-Discourses *	10:30	Anandmurti Gurumaa-Discourses*	18:50	Mangal Matri-Aarti/Chalisa
01:20	Bhajanavali-Devotional songs	10:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	19:20	Swarnajali-Devotional songs
01:30	Swami Kriyanandaji-Discourses *	11:00	Devalaya Dandhan-Travelogue	19:30	Kirtibhaji-Discourses
01:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	11:20	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	19:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs
02:00	Aastha Special Programmes	11:30	Sant Geet-Devotional songs	20:00	Sant Rajinder Singhji-Sant Marj
02:20	Bhajanavali-Devotional songs	11:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	20:20	Swarnajali-Devotional songs
02:30	Sur Sandhya-Devotional Music	12:00	Aastha Yatra-Travelogue	20:30	Chinmaya Mission-Discourses
02:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	12:30	Documentaries-Aastha Special	20:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs
03:00	Swarnajali-Devotional Music	12:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	21:00	ISCKON
03:20	Bhajanavali-Devotional songs	13:00	Aastha Antakshi-Songs competitions	21:20	Swarnajali-Devotional songs
03:30	Aastha Special Programmes	13:30	Jaya Row-Bhagvad Geeta	21:30	Rameshshai Oza-Discourses
03:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	13:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	21:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs
04:00	Sangeet Bharati-Devotional Music	14:00	Swami Sukhdevharanaji	22:00	Ek Namdevji- Discourses
04:20	Bhajanavali-Devotional songs	14:20	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	22:20	Swarnajali-Devotional songs
04:30	Mangal Matri-Manglik	14:30	Documentaries-Aastha Special	22:30	Swami Kriyanandaji-Discourses
05:00	Swami Ramdevji-Yoga	14:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	22:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs
06:00	Aasa Di Ji War Sahib-Gurbani	15:00	Sant Asaram Vani-Discourses	23:00	Sant Rajinder Singhji-Sant Marj *
07:00	Jagadguru Kripakaji-Discourses	15:20	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	23:20	Swarnajali-Devotional songs
07:20	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	15:30	Jainism Special Programs	23:30	Swami Durgakashi -Discourses
07:30	Anandmurti Gurumaa-Discourses	16:30	Ninben Amin-Discourses	23:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs
07:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs	16:50	Swarnajali-Devotional songs		
				00:00	Satyanaarayan Goenkaji-Vipassana*
				01:00	Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev-Isha yog
				02:00	Sant Moran Bapu-Ramkatha*
				03:00	Rameshshai Oza-Bhagwad Katha*
				04:00	Sant Geet-Devotional songs
				04:30	Mangal Matri (Aarti/Chalisa
				05:00	Swami Ramdevji-Yoga
				06:00	Aasa Di Ji War Sahib-Gurbani
				07:00	Sant Asaram Vani-Discourses
				08:00	Jainism Special Programs
				09:00	Anandmurti Gurumaa-Discourses
				10:00	Kirtibhaji-Discourses
				11:00	Satyanaarayan Goenkaji-Vipassana
				12:00	Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev-Isha yog
				13:00	Aastha Special-BAPS & Others
				16:00	Sant Moran Bapu-Ramkatha
				17:00	Rahmas Sahib-Gurbani
				18:00	Evening Worship Prayers
				18:30	Swami Ramdevji-Yoga*
				19:30	Rameshshai Oza-Bhagwad Katha
				20:30	Sant Asaram Vani-Discourses*
				21:30	Jainism Special Programs*
				22:00	Anandmurti Gurumaa-Discourses*
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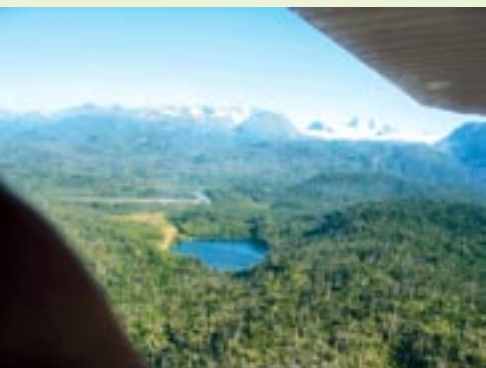
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Unspoiled nature (below, left to right) Coming in for a landing at the Retreat (note the mountains, Martin River, the lake and airstrip), the beach at Kachemak Bay and the homestead house.



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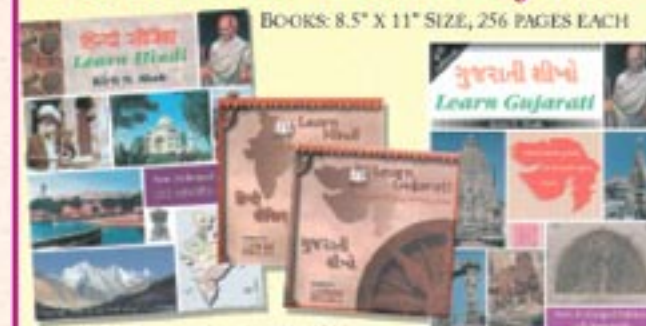


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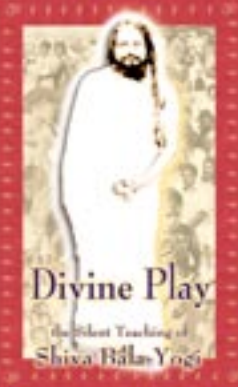
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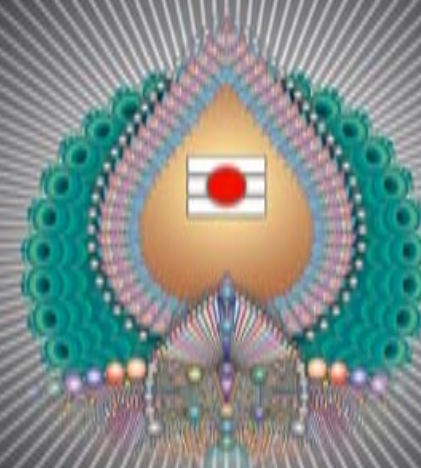
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My Lord of Light

Thou who Art
 The AUM of the Cosmos.
 Thou who are all Ears.

Hear my cries.
 My eyes are in tears for HIM.

Feel my pulse.
 My heart pounds for HIM.

Moment to Moment
 In the depths of the Night
 My mind wonders of HIM.

Palm my forehead:
 I run a temperature;
 Burning in the fires of my longing for HIM.

Thou who removes obstacles.
 Thou who opens doors.
 Test me no longer;
 Lift me to HIM!

I kneel before The Emperor of the Galaxy.
 The Power.
 The Glory.

HIS EYES
 Like two moonbeams
 Shine through the window of my heart.

And as a lily opens to the moonlight
 In the darkness of the Night,
 My heart blossoms in HIS SIGHT.

By Dr Arjunan Subramaniam, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
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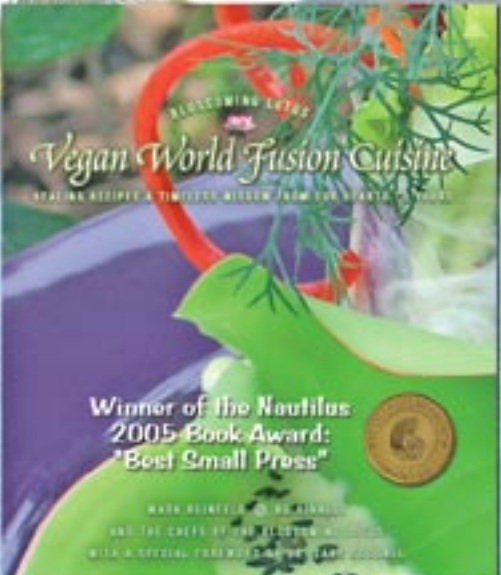
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